

# Nationwide Funding Profile

**Purpose:** To show the Jobs for Nature investment to date across New Zealand and the significance of funding in context of the economic and environmental challenges to the country.

## Significance of Jobs for Nature (J4N) funding to New Zealand during the pandemic

**Economic impacts:** The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant downturn in New Zealand's economy in 2020, with a record 12.2% fall in GDP, and exports of travel services declining significantly after the border closure.<sup>1</sup>

**Employment impacts** were anticipated to be profound, with Infometrics initially predicting more than 250,000 jobs would be lost over the next year (2021), with tourism-related sectors expected to be the worst-hit.<sup>2</sup>

However, the unemployment rate increased to 5.3%, with 37,000 more unemployed people, marking a 32.5% increase following the June 2020 quarter.<sup>3</sup> Data from Statistics New Zealand showed that paid jobs across the entire labour market fell by 24.2% between June 2019 and June 2020.<sup>4</sup>

## J4N programme response

J4N was a strategic response to the anticipated economic and employment impacts of the pandemic. The Government invested \$1.219 billion towards the initiative, aiming to create 11,000 employment opportunities across the regions.<sup>5</sup>

As the pandemic unfolded, the lower-than-expected unemployment rate led to a strategic pivot. While continuing to create employment opportunities, the programme placed a heavier emphasis on environmental benefits. This shift was not only a response to the changing labour market conditions but also an opportunity to address long-standing environmental issues in a coordinated and targeted manner.



## Environmental challenges facing New Zealand

Climate change is exacerbating existing environmental issues and introducing new challenges, including:

**Extreme weather events:** The frequency and severity of extreme weather, such as floods, droughts, and storms, is increasing. This has led to significant economic and social disruption, including damage to infrastructure and impacts on the primary sector.<sup>6</sup>

**Economic impacts:** The immediate costs from extreme weather events driven by warming atmospheric and ocean temperatures are likely to increase. The Treasury has estimated the damage from 2023's Cyclone Gabrielle and Auckland floods may total between \$9 billion and \$14.5 billion.<sup>7</sup>

**Health impacts:** Food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and uncertainty around climate change have ongoing impacts on mental health. Around 750,000 New Zealanders live near rivers and in coastal areas already exposed to extreme flooding.<sup>8</sup>

**Cultural and social wellbeing:** Climate change affects Māori knowledge and practices, including mahinga kai (food gathering) and the transfer of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) across generations. Sites of cultural significance and food security are at risk.<sup>9</sup>

**Biodiversity loss:** New Zealand's unique biodiversity is under threat due to habitat destruction, invasive species, pollution, and climate change. The extinction of native species, particularly birds, is a significant concern. For example, at least 81 animal and plant species have become extinct since human settlement, including 62 bird species.<sup>10</sup>

Invasive species have disrupted local ecosystems, leading to the decline of many endemic species. Over 80 exotic species brought by humans have become established, contributing to the decline of original ecosystems.<sup>11</sup>

**Water quality and freshwater ecosystems:** The quality of New Zealand's freshwater bodies is compromised by pollutants from urban and agricultural sources. Excessive nutrients and sedimentation have degraded water quality, impacting ecosystems and making activities like swimming and traditional food gathering unsafe.

Between 2016 and 2020, about 55% of New Zealand's rivers were found to be in dire condition, showing moderate to severe signs of impairment according to the Macroinvertebrate Community Index. This tool assesses the health of rivers by examining the types and numbers of small water creatures, such as insects and snails, living in them.<sup>12</sup>

**Soil degradation:** Soil health is critical for New Zealand's agriculture. Intensive land use can lead to soil compaction, reduced fertility, and erosion. Separately between 2012 and 2018 indigenous land cover decreased by 12,869 hectares.<sup>13</sup>

## How is J4N investment addressing environmental challenges facing the region while creating employment opportunities?

Data as at 30 September 2023

<b>Funding</b>	\$1.2 billion across 489 projects
<b>Employment opportunities</b>	13,349
<b>Hours worked</b>	9.08 million

## Social and wellbeing benefits

**Employment:** All J4N projects create employment opportunities. Many projects employed iwi/hapū (kinship groups) members, previously unemployed/underemployed individuals, and those in industries displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes roles in pest control, nursery operations, ecological assessments, planting, and conservation services.

**Skills and training:** The programme includes nationwide training to improve environmental outcomes, with specific areas of focus, such as predator control, ecological restoration, and nursery work. Over 300 projects are dedicated to building environmental management capacity and capability, incorporating practices of kaitiakitanga (guardianship), and strengthening connections with natural landscapes.

**Cultural benefits:** Over 60 projects are focused on strengthening iwi/hapū relationships within their rohe (territories), focusing on cultural restoration projects that protect and enhance biodiversity values while providing social benefits to local communities.

## Environmental benefits

**Ecosystem restoration:** A core focus of the J4N investment is restoring ecosystems across landscapes including wetlands, forests, coastal areas, and waterways. This involves activities such as pest and weed control, native replanting, and habitat protection for vulnerable species.

**Biodiversity protection:** Projects target the protection and recovery of threatened species and habitats, with large-scale predator control initiatives aimed at preventing the extinction of species like the kākārīki karaka (orange-fronted parakeet).

**Reducing biosecurity risks:** 259 projects are dedicated to pest and weed management. This investment delivers more extensive control operations across New Zealand’s treasured landscapes.

The combined efforts of the National Wilding Conifer Control Programme and the National Wallaby Control Programme help prevent the spread of invasive species that threaten New Zealand’s native flora and fauna, and provide greater protection for our agricultural sector from further threats.

**Freshwater restoration:** 229 freshwater projects aim to restore and enhance waterways, focusing on improving the health of river catchments, establishing riparian protection zones, and undertaking destocking, fencing, and restoration planting on lands affecting water quality.

## Economic benefits

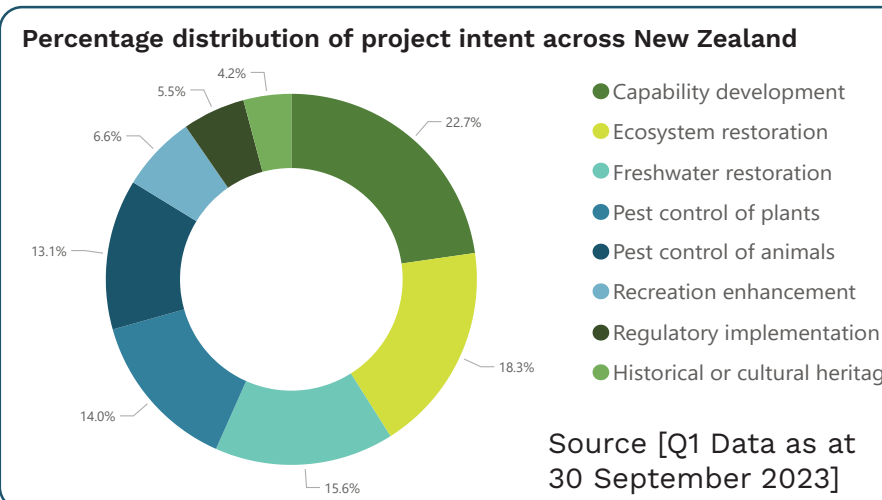
By creating employment opportunities and building capacity within communities, projects indirectly contribute to regional economic growth. This includes providing employment opportunities that are beneficial to whānau (family) and hapū, as well as the wider economy. A spillover benefit is economic savings from environmental damages.

## Overview of labour market participation rates for New Zealand

Labour market	
Working age population <sup>14</sup>	4,191,000 (2023)
Participation <sup>15</sup>	71.9% (Dec 2023)
Employment rate <sup>16</sup>	69.0% NEET 11.7% (Dec 2023)
Median annual household income <sup>17</sup>	\$115,200 (2023)
Unemployment rate <sup>18</sup>	4.0% (Dec 2023)

Māori <sup>15</sup>	
Working age population <sup>19</sup>	635,600 (Dec 2023)
Participation <sup>20</sup>	70.3% (Dec 2023)
Unemployment rate <sup>21</sup>	7.9% NEET 18.7% (Dec 2023)

Pasifika	
Working age population <sup>22</sup>	291,000 (Dec 2023)
Participation <sup>23</sup>	69.2% (Dec 2023)
Unemployment rate <sup>24</sup>	6.6% NEET 16.3% (Dec 2023)



Images courtesy of MfE

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