



\$1.2 billion for nature: What Jobs for Nature delivered

Summary of findings of the J4N independent evaluation

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About Allen + Clarke

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MAIN MESSAGES

The Jobs for Nature (J4N) programme was an effective intervention that successfully delivered employment when it was needed while establishing strong foundations for enduring environmental benefits



The programme delivered significant employment and environmental benefits

The programme exceeded its employment targets and delivered environmental restoration activities at scale. While full environmental outcomes will take years to materialise, the programme's focus on scientifically supported conservation practices provides strong foundations for significant future benefits

Meaningful Māori partnerships delivered transformative outcomes but varied in quality

Many Māori communities described the programme as transformative, enabling essential work on their whenua and opportunities to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. However, some felt partnerships with agencies were "one-sided", highlighting the need for genuine power-sharing and adequate engagement processes.

Programme flexibility enabled adaptation to changing circumstances

The programme successfully adapted from an immediate COVID response to greater emphasis on environmental outcomes and building environmental and conservation capacity. This flexibility proved valuable in meeting evolving needs while maintaining core objectives.

The programme demonstrated additionality beyond its financial investment

The programme accelerated conservation work beyond normal funding mechanisms, converting environmental priorities into active projects at scale and pace. It also generated spillover benefits, including enhanced emergency response capacity and innovative conservation approaches.

National coherence was strong but regional coordination varied significantly

The programme aligned well with national environmental strategies and avoided duplication with other initiatives. However, regional coordination varied considerably, with some areas achieving strong coordination through existing frameworks while others experienced weaker coordination.

Sustainability foundations are solid

The programme's focus on scientifically supported conservation practices provides confidence in long-term environmental benefits, and many participants transitioned to permanent employment. However, historic underfunding of conservation work risks undermining the progress achieved during the programme.

Key insights and evaluative judgements

This report presents a summary of findings from an independent evaluation of the J4N programme. The evaluation sought to understand how effectively the programme has been implemented and the extent to which it is on track to deliver its intended outcomes for participants and the environment. The evaluation framed its investigation of the programme under six key criteria: effectiveness, relevance, coherence, additionality, sustainability and learning and improvement.

The three-year evaluation conducted extensive qualitative research through regional and thematic case studies. In total, this involved 150 interviews with project stakeholders, iwi representatives, and government officials. The summary also draws on the findings of a dedicated Te Ao Māori evaluation, which assessed the programme through a Māori lens using Critical Tiriti Analysis and Te Whare Tapa Whā frameworks. Quantitative analysis examined administrative data from J4N projects to assess programme outputs and investment distribution.

Principal findings from the evaluation, and overall judgements against the first five evaluation criteria, are provided below. The sixth criterion of 'learning and improvement' is a descriptive criterion, which captures lessons and insights from programme implementation rather than providing an evaluative judgment. These lessons are provided in the 'learnings and implications' section below.

Principal findings

Effectiveness

The J4N programme was highly effective in creating employment opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery period. By December 2024, the programme had exceeded its objective of 12,000 employment opportunities, providing over 15,500 people with jobs and delivering over 12.5 million hours of work. This substantial impact on local economies was achieved through direct economic stimulation via wages, equipment expenditure, and services. The provision of stable, meaningful, and adequately paid employment led to increased economic stability, the ability to remain in the community, and greater overall wellbeing in whānau and communities.

Determining the effectiveness of the J4N programme in creating environmental impacts is challenging, as the outcomes of restoration activities will take time to fully realise. However, the programme has delivered substantial environmental outputs including the remediation of fish passages and extensive planting and pest control activities. While full environmental outcomes will take years to materialise, the scale and scientific basis of activities provide strong foundations for significant future benefits. Anecdotal evidence from project personnel suggests increased biodiversity in treated areas, with reports of more birds, bats, and native plants.

From a Te Ao Māori perspective of effectiveness, the J4N programme provided the government with a mechanism to fulfil its Treaty of Waitangi obligations by working with Māori



to support the exercise of rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga over their whenua. Some iwi and hapū-based organisations that received J4N funding viewed it as an opportunity to transform the relationship between the Crown and Māori, enabling them to carry out much-needed work on lands returned through Treaty settlements. The J4N investment was described as a “gamechanger” by many Māori communities who received funding. However, some iwi and Māori organisations felt that the partnership with the Crown was somewhat one-sided, focusing on the outcomes that were sought by agencies, as opposed to a genuine iwi partnership with shared goals. Many Māori communities felt that the investment fell short of the redress needed to address the environmental degradation of their whenua.

The programme enhanced wellbeing across all four domains of Te Whare Tapa Whā: spiritual wellbeing through restoring the mauri of people and places and reconnecting with their maunga, whenua, waterways and sacred sites; physical wellbeing by engaging iwi communities in active work and restoring traditional food gathering and rongoā places; mental wellbeing through meaningful connection to their pepeha or identity, and nature restoration that built confidence and purpose; and whānau wellbeing by providing steady income and enabling reconnection with whenua, whakapapa and other iwi members.

A Critical Tiriti Analysis found that while the programme performed well on Wairuatanga, it was inconsistent in its performance against the Preamble, Kāwantanga, Rangatiratanga, and Ōritetanga. Despite these mixed results, the J4N programme was mostly effective in supporting Māori aspirations, cultural affirmation, and greater autonomy in delivering environmental outcomes.

The programme's success was underpinned by effective cross-agency collaboration through strong governance structures, including SLU Ministers' oversight, an independent Reference Group, and a Deputy Chief Executives Group that acted as the collaboration "engine room." The scale, urgency, and shared objectives created powerful incentives for agencies to work beyond traditional silos, with most government participants describing J4N as the most successful cross-agency programme they had experienced. The programme effectively balanced rapid deployment through flexible procurement and established partnerships with capacity building, evolving from immediate job creation for COVID-displaced workers to longer-term skill development. Meaningful partnerships, particularly with iwi and Māori organisations who brought holistic "maunga through to waterways" environmental management approaches, proved essential for achieving sustained environmental and cultural outcomes.

<i>Embedded</i>	Based on these findings, the evaluation has assessed the J4N effectiveness criterion as established . This aspect of the programme shows evidence of good performance overall, with some weaknesses which are easily rectified.
<i>Established</i>	
<i>Enabled</i>	
<i>Emerging</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The programme exceeded its employment targets and delivered substantial environmental outputs at scale 	



- J4N had effective programme architecture, including effective governance structures and flexible management (evolving from immediate COVID response to longer-term development)
- The programme was effective at cross-agency collaboration, mostly breaking down traditional government silos through strong coordination and shared incentives.
- This collaboration enabled coordinated delivery across five agencies while maintaining specialist expertise, providing a replicable model for future large-scale government programmes.
- There was some variation in how iwi and Māori experienced the programme, with some describing it as transformative and others felt partnerships were "one-sided" and investment was insufficient given the scale of environmental degradation of their whenua.

Relevance

The J4N programme demonstrated strong relevance throughout its implementation. The design and implementation of the J4N programme have successfully aligned with its policy intent and objectives.

The programme's three overarching objectives – improving the environment, creating employment opportunities, and building resilience – have remained relevant throughout its lifetime. The high-level nature of these objectives allowed the programme to adapt to changing economic and environmental circumstances, such as shifting focus from job creation during the COVID-19 pandemic to greater emphasis on environmental outcomes in mid-2021. Agencies implemented this shift according to their unique mandates; for example, Kānoa and LINZ retained strong employment focus while MfE, MPI and DOC increasingly emphasised environmental outcomes.

The programme's flexibility proved particularly valuable in tailoring projects to regional and iwi priorities, with rural areas focusing on employment opportunities where most needed and other areas emphasised iwi capacity building, ensuring delivery remained relevant to diverse local contexts and organisational needs.

<i>Embedded</i>	<p>Based on these findings, the evaluation has assessed the J4N relevance criterion as embedded.</p> <p>This aspect of the programme shows very good to excellent performance. No weaknesses of any consequence. Some examples of exemplary performance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation found endorsement across all five government agencies that the programme was a relevant response to the COVID-19 pandemic • It demonstrated successful alignment with policy intent, and effective adaptation to changing circumstances from COVID response to environmental focus
<i>Established</i>	
<i>Enabled</i>	
<i>Emerging</i>	



- The programme successfully shifted emphasis while maintaining all three core objectives, showing robust design that could adapt to remain relevant to changing circumstances
- J4N was responsive to regional needs and could be tailored to diverse regional and iwi priorities.

Additionality

J4N attracted substantial co-funding investment, bringing total programme investment to \$1.49 billion compared to the \$1.18 billion Crown funding allocation. This indicates that J4N identified initiatives in which partners were willing to commit their own resources to advance shared environmental and employment objectives.

The evaluation found that the programme added value beyond the direct investment of funds. Evidence suggests that J4N created employment opportunities that would not have occurred through standard labour market mechanisms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The programme accelerated conservation work beyond what would have been achievable through standard funding mechanisms, converting identified environmental priorities into active projects at scale and pace.

The programme also built skills and capacity that enabled communities to respond to climate-related emergencies, with J4N-trained crews providing essential support during Cyclone Gabrielle recovery efforts. Additionally, J4N stimulated local economies by increasing spending at local businesses and purchasing equipment and services from local suppliers.

The funding enabled the creation of tools, models, and partnerships that will continue to add value beyond the programme's lifespan, such as innovative ecosystem restoration methods and integrating mātauranga Māori into environmental solutions. New workforce sharing models developed through J4N also demonstrated potential for business continuity in future crises.

<i>Embedded</i>	Based on these findings, the evaluation has assessed the J4N additionality criterion as embedded . This aspect of the programme shows very good to excellent performance. No weaknesses of any consequence. Some examples of exemplary performance.
<i>Established</i>	
<i>Enabled</i>	
<i>Emerging</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • J4N attracted substantial co-funding, with a leverage ratio of approximately 26 cents for every dollar of Crown investment. • The programme demonstrated additionality by accelerating conservation work, turning known priorities that lacked funding into real projects at a larger scale and faster pace than normal government budgets allow • J4N created employment opportunities that likely would not have existed through standard labour market mechanisms, particularly valuable in conservation sectors typically constrained by funding rather than skills availability 	



- The programme generated spillover benefits including workforce capacity for emergency response (Cyclone Gabrielle), local economic stimulation, and development of innovative conservation technologies and methods
- J4N enabled value creation through tools, partnerships, and workforce models that will continue beyond the programme's life, including integration of mātauranga Māori approaches
- Social procurement approaches delivered additional community benefits, though with some increased contract management overhead for less experienced organisations

Coherence

The J4N programme demonstrated coherence with national environmental strategies and priorities, aligning well with initiatives such as the National Pest Plant Accord, the national biodiversity strategy *Te Mana o te Taiao*, and MfE's Essential Freshwater reforms.

The job creation aspect of J4N was well-aligned with other support measures, avoiding duplication and leveraging existing initiatives like the Provincial Growth Fund, particularly in regions with strong collaborative frameworks.

However, coherence varied significantly at the regional level, with some regions like Te Tau Ihu achieving strong coordination through the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance's landscape-scale planning approach, while others like Auckland and Manawatū-Whanganui experienced less coordination, leading to concerns about potential duplication and missed collaboration opportunities. This variation highlights the importance of regional coordination frameworks for maximising programme coherence and impact.

<i>Embedded</i>	Based on these findings, the evaluation has assessed the J4N coherence criterion as enabled . This aspect of the programme shows evidence of fair performance. Some positive achievements and some weaknesses but these are not 'deal breakers'. Heading in the right direction
<i>Established</i>	
<i>Enabled</i>	
<i>Emerging</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme demonstrated coherence at the national level with clear alignment to key strategies and successful job creation coordination that avoided duplication with other programmes. • There was variation in coherence at the regional level. While regions with existing regional-level structures showed coordination through entities such as the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance, others had weaker coordination leading to risks of duplicated efforts and missed collaboration opportunities 	



Sustainability

The evaluation found that J4N has established a foundation for enduring impact. The programme's contribution to developing a sustainable environmental workforce is one of its most important long-term achievements. The successful transition of many participants into permanent roles across sectors demonstrates that targeted investment in skills development can create lasting career pathways in conservation work. The programme's shift from immediate job creation to longer-term capacity building enhanced sustainability by creating roles with greater career development potential.

From an environmental perspective, the programme's strategic focus on proven, scientifically supported conservation practices creates reasonable confidence in long-term ecological benefits, despite the inherent challenge of measuring conservation outcomes within short timeframes. The emphasis on succession planning, particularly within iwi-led initiatives that view their work as intergenerational investments, suggests that environmental stewardship cultures established through J4N may persist beyond formal funding periods. However, the sustainability of environmental outcomes remains vulnerable to external pressures, with ongoing pollution and ecosystem degradation in some regions threatening to undermine restoration efforts regardless of the quality of conservation work undertaken.

The use of formal preservation mechanisms such as QEII Trust covenants and landowner agreements provides institutional protection for environmental gains beyond the programme's lifecycle.

However, significant sustainability challenges remain, including ongoing environmental degradation and the sector's historical underinvestment, which limit the ability to maintain conservation efforts at the scale achieved during the programme's active funding period.

<i>Embedded</i>	<p>Based on these findings, the evaluation has assessed the J4N sustainability criterion as established.</p> <p>This aspect of the programme shows evidence of good performance overall, with some weaknesses which are easily rectified.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme shows positive sustainability prospects through scientifically supported conservation practices with robust evidence bases • Many participants successfully transitioned to permanent employment or secured ongoing contract work across various sectors due to their J4N training and experience • Formal preservation mechanisms such as QEII Trust covenants and landowner agreements were employed to ensure long-term protection of environmental outcomes. • The historic underfunding of conservation work threatens the sustainability of programme benefits, making it difficult to maintain environmental efforts at the scale achieved during active funding.
<i>Established</i>	
<i>Enabled</i>	
<i>Emerging</i>	

Learnings and implications

The evaluation of J4N has highlighted several lessons and areas for improvement that can inform future initiatives.

Effective delivery of large-scale projects requires collaboration and coordination at all levels of the system

Large-scale government programmes require coordinated effort across multiple levels to achieve successful outcomes. The J4N programme demonstrated that collaboration can be highly effective when the right structures and incentives are established throughout the system.

Strategic leadership drives programme success. Implementing complex multi-agency programmes requires aligned leadership from Ministers through to operational staff. The J4N programme's success stemmed from establishing the SLU Ministers' group for high-level oversight and sector alignment, while the Deputy Chief Executives Group functioned as the operational nexus of the programme during its establishment. This effective programme architecture enabled coordinated delivery across five agencies while maintaining specialist expertise, providing a replicable model for future large-scale government programmes.

Central coordination functions are essential for system-wide alignment. The J4N Secretariat demonstrated the importance of dedicated coordination capacity, successfully aligning five agencies and multiple funding streams while minimising duplication of effort. Further, retaining a degree of agency autonomy is important to leverage specialised knowledge, expertise, and connections in specific domains.

Regional coordination approaches can help to maximise programme impact. Regions like Te Tau Ihu achieving strong coordination through the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance's integrated planning approach and iwi involvement in project selection and delivery, while other regions struggled to establish effective regional coordination mechanisms. Building on existing groups or supporting them to emerge organically, rather than being government-led, can enhance the effectiveness of regional groups by leveraging existing networks and local knowledge.

At the regional and project level it is vital to ensure projects have the right partners, expertise and networks, particularly with iwi and hapū. Some J4N projects encountered challenges due to insufficient coordination of Māori engagement activities, such as a lake restoration project that failed to coordinate iwi member involvement or capacity building. Adequate time for planning and engagement activities is crucial to ensure meaningful involvement of iwi and hapū.

Strong data systems enable effective programme monitoring and responsive management

Large-scale government programmes require robust data systems to track progress and enable responsive management. The J4N programme reinforced that developing streamlined data, monitoring and reporting systems should be a priority before procurement and



contracting begins, reducing administrative burden while providing clear metrics for measuring success.

Early establishment of consistent metrics enables programme-wide tracking. While the J4N programme's rapid establishment was necessary given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, future programmes would benefit from implementing consistent metrics from the outset to enable comprehensive progress tracking, building on J4N's experience in developing these systems over time.

When programmes have objectives related to delivering employment, social or wellbeing benefits, collecting demographic and other relevant background data is essential. This enables agencies to understand who is benefiting from the programme, ensure it reaches intended target groups, and evaluate broader social and economic impacts beyond immediate outputs, supporting both accountability and programme improvement.

Streamlined reporting processes reduce administrative burden across agencies and contracted providers. A high number of stakeholders reported challenges with J4N reporting requirements, including resource-intensive processes and lack of clarity about reporting expectations. A single reporting system across funds and agencies streamlines processes and reduces administrative overhead, enabling projects to focus resources on delivery rather than reporting compliance.

Flexible and agile procurement approaches help set large scale programmes up for success

Large-scale programmes that aim to tackle complex issues present an opportunity to think differently about procurement. The J4N programme demonstrated the value of flexible procurement strategies by successfully transitioning from rapid fund deployment to longer-term capacity building and strategic environmental outcomes.

In urgent delivery contexts, leveraging established partnerships and existing programmes enables rapid deployment while maintaining quality outcomes. Where programme timelines allow for deliberate procurement design, social procurement delivers broader community value and achieves outcomes beyond immediate project delivery. This includes using local suppliers and fostering local businesses while maintaining clear accountability and transparency guidelines, ensuring procurement contributes to wider community development objectives.

Responsive contractual frameworks are essential for programme effectiveness. Some J4N projects reported that inflexible contracts created unnecessary burdens, with contracted milestones set at unachievable levels or under-costed due to inflation. Flexible contracts that can adapt to changing contexts are crucial, including the ability to adjust targets when circumstances shift, such as when anticipated high unemployment rates did not materialise or when project conditions evolved beyond initial expectations.



Partnerships with Māori contribute to achieving transformative programme outcomes

Large-scale programmes present opportunities for the Crown to fulfil its Treaty obligations and enable iwi and hapū to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. The J4N programme's experiences with Māori partnership provide lessons for future programmes, particularly those involving environmental outcomes where indigenous knowledge and partnership are fundamental to success.

Meaningful partnership requires genuine power-sharing and adequate investment. From a Te Ao Māori perspective, J4N enabled opportunities for iwi and hapū to exercise authority over their lands. However, a Critical Tiriti Analysis found inconsistent performance against the Treaty principles of Rangatiratanga and Ōritetanga. While some iwi viewed J4N as an opportunity to transform Crown-Māori relationships, others felt the partnership fell short of genuine power-sharing.

Adequate time and investment are fundamental to effective partnership. Some projects included meaningful partnerships with iwi and Māori organisations, which enabled the initiative to be well placed for achieving sustained environmental and cultural outcomes. These projects saw mutual benefits. J4N enabled iwi and hapū to carry out work on lands returned through Treaty settlements, supporting Māori development, cultural affirmation, and greater autonomy in delivering environmental outcomes while creating value through integration of mātauranga Māori approaches. Other J4N projects encountered challenges due to limited investment in Māori, hapū, and iwi engagement processes. Adequate time for planning and engagement activities is crucial to ensure meaningful Māori participation.

Strategic capacity building creates lasting impact beyond programme completion

Large-scale programmes present opportunities to build enduring capacity that extends beyond immediate project delivery. J4N projects that implemented formal training programmes aligned with recognised qualifications enabled the development of a trained workforce that will generate value beyond the life of the programme. Many J4N participants successfully transitioned to permanent employment or secured ongoing contract work, with their programme training and diverse work experience proving instrumental in creating these opportunities. This progression demonstrates the importance of designing programmes with explicit pathways to ongoing employment.

Long-term sustainability requires strategic planning that addresses both opportunities and systemic constraints

Large-scale programmes must plan for enduring impact beyond active funding periods, recognising that programme-level interventions occur within broader systemic contexts. The J4N programme strategically funded well-established, scientifically supported conservation practices, creating reasonable confidence in long-term ecological benefits despite challenges in measuring outcomes within short timeframes.

Early network building and transition planning support enduring impact. Building strong networks and alliances throughout the programme enables sustainable outcomes, with early implementation of platforms for sharing resources, accessing future funding streams, and



collaborating on innovative approaches better supporting long-term sustainability. Embedding transition planning from programme inception provides ongoing guidance and resources to help projects establish systems that sustain benefits beyond the programme's conclusion.

Emphasis on succession planning, particularly within iwi-led initiatives that view their work as intergenerational investments, suggests that environmental stewardship cultures established through programmes like J4N may persist beyond formal funding periods. These cultural approaches to sustainability extend beyond institutional timeframes and provide valuable models for embedding lasting change within communities and organisations.

Innovative restoration techniques create scalable approaches for environmental programmes

J4N projects demonstrated that innovative restoration methods can deliver enhanced environmental and social outcomes. Projects successfully trialed a diverse range of novel environmental restoration techniques that addressed multiple environmental challenges simultaneously. These included the release of dung beetles in catchments, which improved water quality while increasing the turnover of available grazing area, demonstrating how biological solutions can deliver both environmental and agricultural benefits. The production of harakeke lake weed mats provided dual benefits of weed suppression and native habitat creation, offering freshwater koura and native fish species shelter while addressing invasive plant management. Projects also pioneered genomics-based approaches to predator control and developed integrated catchment management plans that represented new ways of understanding and managing land and water systems.

These innovations demonstrate that effective restoration techniques can combine mātauranga Māori with emerging technologies, and that solutions delivering multiple co-benefits are well placed to achieve lasting environmental outcomes.

Innovative partnership models enable transformative landscape-scale outcomes

J4N projects demonstrated that innovative partnership models can transform both the scale and effectiveness of environmental restoration when they embed Te Tiriti principles in collaborative decision-making. The Treaty House partnership approach emerged as an effective innovation. This model recognises both tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga as distinct but complementary authorities functioning together. The approach ensured equal recognition of, protection of, and input from tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti entities (such as Crown agencies). Project personnel noted how it placed iwi values at the centre of decision-making while enabling effective partnership.

Regional-scale partnership working, exemplified in Te Tau Ihu, demonstrated how shared decision-making and resource pooling could advance collective visions for environmental restoration. These partnership models also facilitated innovative alignment between Western and iwi practice, such as integrating forestry management principles with iwi values related to ngahere restoration.

The programme demonstrated how partnership approaches can shift relationships between previously disconnected sectors through collaborative engagement strategies. For example,



in Northland, Te Mana o te Wai funded J4N projects demonstrated that effective partnerships can emerge when project teams included people who whakapapa to local marae alongside respected farming community leaders. By supporting farmers to achieve fencing and planting that aligned with freshwater goals while recognising their expertise and operational needs, J4N illustrated how partnership approaches can shift environmental action from externally imposed requirements to locally-driven initiatives. This can generate commitment from all partners that extends beyond programme funding periods and regulatory compliance.



1 Introduction

This report presents a summary of findings from a three-year independent evaluation (conducted from 2022-2025) of the Jobs for Nature (J4N) programme (a five-year initiative that operated from 2020-2025).

1.1 The Jobs for Nature programme

J4N is a \$1.185 billion programme that manages funding across multiple government agencies to benefit the environment, people, and the regions. It is part of the COVID-19 recovery package. The objectives of the J4N programme are to:

- create nature-related employment opportunities for people, at pace, in regions that need work the most
- realise enduring benefits for freshwater ecosystems and water quality, biodiversity, climate change and cultural values
- support sustainable land use and the implementation of new regulatory requirements, including for freshwater, biodiversity, and climate change.

The programme was overseen by the Sustainable Land Use (SLU) Ministers' group¹, which was created to provide strategic oversight, make decisions, and have overall accountability for the programme. The SLU Ministers established the strategic principles, priorities, and overall funding phases for the programme. A J4N Reference Group supported the SLU Ministers, providing insight into what was needed to deliver a diverse, regionally spread programme. The Reference Group encompassed a range of perspectives including Māori landowners, regional councils, recovery experience, and NGOs, with an independent chair. A key aspect of the Reference Group's work was the creation of an Investment Framework to guide strategic funding decisions for the programme.

J4N was delivered through 25 separate funds across the Department of Conservation (DOC), Ministry for the Environment (MfE), Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), Kānoa Regional Economic Development and Investment Unit (Kānoa), and Land Information New Zealand (LINZ). Each agency had control over its area of the programme, with implementation design and decisions made within individual departments and ministries. A Secretariat has a coordinating function across the programme, supporting Ministers, providing consolidated reporting and programme-level insights, and acting as a conduit between the delivery agencies.

¹ SLU Ministers' group was comprised of the Minister for the Environment, Minister of Local Government, Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Biosecurity, Minister for Economic and Regional Development, Minister of Forestry, Minister for Climate Change, Minister of Conservation, and Minister for Land Information.



A total of 505 projects were funded through J4N.² These ranged from large-scale regional or national initiatives to small community projects.³ The funding supported people into nature-based work. Specific activities include vegetation planting for freshwater and biodiversity restoration; fencing waterways; pest control (including predators, wilding conifers and other pest plants); fish passage remediation; and skills training to support people into environmental careers. Organisations that received funding include local government, Iwi, community groups, and private companies.⁴

1.2 Evaluation purpose

The J4N Secretariat commissioned a three-year, independent evaluation of the J4N programme. The purpose of the evaluation is to understand how effectively the programme was implemented and the extent to which it is on track to deliver its intended outcomes for participants and the environment. Specifically, the purpose of the evaluation was to:

- Learn from the set-up, implementation, and results of the programme to inform future cross-government initiatives.
- Assess the extent to which the potential future outcomes for the participants and the environment are likely to be achieved.

1.3 Key evaluation questions

The themes and key evaluation questions (KEQs) that have framed the evaluation are listed in Table 1. The KEQs were initially identified by the Secretariat and refined in collaboration with *Allen + Clarke* through the evaluation design workshop held in September 2022.

Table 1: Key evaluation questions and themes

Theme	Questions
Effectiveness	To what extent have the anticipated medium-term outcomes of the J4N programme been achieved? To what extent is the programme on track to achieve its expected long-term outcomes? To what extent and in what ways is the programme working for regional communities, Māori and the environment? What factors may have supported or hindered successful implementation? What unintended results have been generated (positive/negative)?

² This figure excludes 8 administration projects and 5 overhead projects

³ Administrative data to December 2024 shows that the programme funded 37 nationwide projects and 486 regional projects.

⁴ Administrative data to December 2024 shows that the programme funded 110 projects led by councils, 17 led by Crown or government organisations, 262 led by charitable trusts and NGOs, 25 led by Māori organisations or landowners and 88 led by companies.



Theme	Questions
Relevance	<p>How well does the design and implementation of J4N align with the policy intent and objectives of the programme?</p> <p>To what extent are the initial objectives and scope still relevant and has the programme been able to adjust to changing circumstances over its lifetime?</p>
Coherence	<p>To what extent was the J4N project selection approach coherent with regional/catchment and national needs?</p> <p>To what extent are there synergy effects between J4N projects?</p> <p>To what extent has the job creation element of the programme been coherent with other support measures?</p>
Additionality	<p>To what extent has J4N as a programme added value beyond the individual funds?</p> <p>How much of what has happened would have happened anyway or been funded through other mechanisms?</p> <p>What additional funding/resourcing has the J4N programme attracted towards reaching its objectives?</p>
Sustainability	<p>To what extent are the results of the projects likely to continue after the end of the programme?</p> <p>What factors influence the sustainability of the projects?</p> <p>What, if anything, has the programme contributed to structuring effects and how agencies work together?</p>
Learning and improvement	<p>What can be learnt from implementation and what might we do differently in future?</p> <p>Did the programme generate approaches that can be implemented elsewhere?</p> <p>Has the programme trialled innovative approaches and if so, what has been learned from them?</p>

1.4 Evaluation methodology

The J4N evaluation was conducted over three annual cycles of data collection as described below.

1.4.1 Year 1: Place-based case studies

Year 1 of the evaluation involved three place-based case studies focusing on exploring the delivery of the J4N programme in specific regions. These case studies were conducted in early 2023, in the third year of the J4N programme's operation.

The evaluation team developed a selection framework for the place-based case studies, aiming to include urban and rural areas, geographic spread across Aotearoa, and a range of project types and funded organisations. The framework and the selected regions are provided in Table 2.



Table 2: Place-based case studies selection framework

Case study site	Geography	Place-based points of interest
Auckland	North Island Urban	Restoration projects in a metro city and on islands, employment and partnering.
Manawatū-Whanganui	North Island Predominantly rural	Diversity in project size and focus, high number of iwi and Māori organisations as funding recipients
Te Tau Ihu (Tasman-Nelson)	South Island Predominantly rural	Range of funding recipients including local government, Iwi/Māori organisations and environmental NGOs

The evaluators selected a sample of Jobs for Nature projects delivered within each region. This included seven projects in Te Tau Ihu, seven in Manawatū-Whanganui, and six in Auckland. The selected projects were undertaking a range of environmental restoration activities, and the fund holders included iwi, NGOs, and councils.

In May 2023, the evaluation team undertook site visits to each of the three regions and completed interviews with a total of 48 participants. Interviewees included iwi governance board members; regional stakeholders from environmental NGOs and local government; organisation CEOs; project managers; and project kaimahi.

The evaluation team also conducted a desk-based review of available documentation related to the case study sites and the projects included in the sample. This included regional strategy documents and plans, project monitoring data (where available), and project planning and delivery documents.

1.4.2 Year 2: Theme-based case studies

A key data collection method for Year 2 of the evaluation was three thematic case studies. These case studies were conducted in early 2024, in the fourth year of the J4N programme's operation. The themes were:

- **Social impact**, defined as the effect of an activity, project or programme on people and communities. Social impact projects in this case study were selected because they applied for J4N funding under the following categories: recreation enhancement; historical and cultural heritage restoration; skills and training; employment; and capability development. The J4N projects in the social impact case study included projects working with estuaries and lakes, island restoration work, a mainland sanctuary, and the restoration of Māori land blocks.
- **Freshwater restoration**, which included J4N projects that had a focus on freshwater rehabilitation, remediating fish passages, wetland restoration, stream and lake riparian planting, and aquatic weed control.



- **Climate change resilience**, which encompassed efforts to moderate potential damages or to benefit from opportunities associated with climate change. J4N projects in this case study undertook climate change resilience activities such as planting trees, erosion control, riparian planting, and developing farm and environmental management plans.

The evaluators selected a sample of 24 J4N projects which were included in the thematic case studies, with eight projects selected under each theme. The J4N projects were delivered in Te Tai Tokerau, Waikato, the Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay, the Wellington region and Te Tau Ihu. The selected projects were undertaking a range of environmental restoration activities, and the fund holders included iwi, NGOs, farming communities, and councils. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a total of 84 participants, in similar roles to those interviewed in Year 1.

The evaluation team conducted a desk-based review of available documentation related to the case study themes and the projects, focusing on similar documentation and data to that which was reviewed in Year 1.

1.4.3 Te Ao Māori evaluation

The J4N evaluation also involved a Te Ao Māori workstream, which assessed the programme through a Māori lens. This was conducted in parallel to the place-based and thematic case studies, in the third and fourth years of the J4N programme's operation.

The Te Ao Māori evaluation was based on data collected during Years 1 and of the J4N evaluation. This included 14 key informant interviews with representatives of government agencies involved in the J4N programme, site visits to 8 Māori and iwi-led J4N projects during the place-based case studies undertaken during Year 1 of the evaluation and site visits to 20 Māori J4N projects during the Year 2 thematic case studies, and a hui with key Māori leaders within DOC (Ngā Whenua Rāhui/Treaty Settlements) and MfE (Investment).

The evaluators also undertook a review of documents and literature, including Treaty settlement documentation, J4N project materials, literature related to mātauranga Māori and the taiao, and media articles related to J4N projects. The analysis included assessment of J4N administrative data from 294 Māori or iwi-led projects. These data were analysed to identify Māori J4N project outputs and outcomes.

The evaluation findings were analysed and reported through two Māori-centred evaluation approaches. Critical Tiriti Analysis (CTA) was used to frame a retrospective, mana-enhancing review of the findings through a close reading of the findings against the five elements of the Treaty of Waitangi (Preamble, Kāwantanga, Rangatiratanga, Ōritetanga, Wairuatanga). The evaluators then made a determination against those elements and the experiences of Māori J4N funding recipients, project personnel and kaimahi.

The findings were also analysed through Te Whare Tapa Whā, a holistic model of wellbeing that draws on the structure of a whareniui, acknowledging the equal importance of hinengaro (mental), tinana (physical), wairua (spiritual) and whānau wellbeing, with whenua (connection to the land) at the foundation.

1.4.4 Year 3: Assessment of components of the J4N programme model

Year 3 of the evaluation focused on generating evidence that could be used to inform the delivery of future large-scale, cross-agency, targeted funding programmes. This final cycle of evaluation was undertaken in early 2025, in the fifth year of the J4N programme's operation. The purpose was to assess key components of the J4N programme model, including which aspects of the model worked well, what challenges or issues were experienced, and what lessons could be captured.

Data were captured through an analysis of 48 reports and documents related to J4N programme design and delivery. These included annual programme review reports, economic impact assessments, benefits insights reports, independent reviews of the programme, project case study reports, and data extracted from project closure reports. The results of the review were analysed to identify key themes under each of the components of the J4N model, and to identify critical success factors that can inform the delivery of similar initiatives in the future.

The Year 3 evaluation also involved qualitative interviews with 18 J4N stakeholders, including representatives of the five government agencies at the central and regional levels, an Advisory Group member, and members of Regional Partnership Groups. These interviews focused on components of the programme model that were relevant to the interviewees' role and involvement in the J4N programme.

1.4.5 Analysis of quantitative programme data

An administrative dataset combining the project reporting data from all five participating agencies as of 31 December 2024 was supplied to *Allen + Clarke*. After removing project codes allocated to the administration of the J4N funds⁵, the dataset described 510 projects in total with quarterly metrics beginning December 2019 through to December 2024, comprising up to 17 data points for each project.

The data analysis included metrics related to the funding investment distribution, employment statistics, and environmental outputs.

1.4.6 Synthesis of evaluation evidence

The evaluation team synthesised the data generated across all three years of the evaluation to extract findings under the criteria of effectiveness, relevance, additionality, coherence, sustainability, and learning and improvement.

Relevant data and findings were extracted from each report. This involved a review of each document to identify key themes, quotes, and data that aligned with each criterion. The coded data were then grouped into broader themes that encapsulated the main findings for the criteria across all reports. The themes identified were also compared across the three reports

⁵ Excluded were 13 project IDs labelled as 'Admin' or 'Overheads' in the supplied data. These were for activities such as partnership establishment, support roles, overheads, programme set up or close down, and coordination/programme management. Collectively \$47.3 million has been paid out.



to identify similarities and differences. The integrated findings were then summarised to highlight the overall findings across the Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 and Te Ao Māori evaluations.

1.4.7 Evaluative judgements

The evidence collected throughout the evaluation has been assessed against the rubric below to assign a maturity rating for each evaluation theme (i.e., effectiveness, relevance, coherence, additionality, sustainability). This provides a high-level evaluative judgement of how each aspect of the J4N programme has performed.

Table 3: Rubric for the evaluation of the Jobs for Nature programme

Emerging	Enabled	Established	Embedded
Evidence of emerging performance. Evidence is patchy or not clear overall. This may be because it cannot be seen yet (that is, has not yet had time to emerge) rather than the performance being unsatisfactory	Evidence of fair performance. Some positive achievements and some weaknesses but these are not 'deal breakers'. Heading in the right direction	Evidence of good performance overall. May have some weaknesses which are easily rectified	Evidence of very good to excellent performance on this aspect, which is embedded as business as usual. No weaknesses of any consequence. Some examples of exemplary performance

1.5 Limitations

The quantitative data has several limitations. The different funding streams and project outcomes had differing metrics recorded, as projects had varying deliverables. For example, hours worked and employment starts were well reported and common across all projects, whereas other metrics (such as hectares planted for different environments) had more variation to allow projects to report directly against their contracted outcomes. While some of these metrics overlapped or measured slightly different things, there were existing summary metrics that were used for this report or were derived from existing metrics. There was also some inconsistency in the extent to which project metrics were entered by the funded projects; for example, some data were recorded at regular intervals while other data were entered at irregular intervals, summarising work to date.

The evaluation team took a purposive sampling approach to select the case study locations and the projects sampled at each site. The team included a cross-section of projects and interview participants. The non-random sampling technique means that findings are not necessarily generalisable.

The findings from the qualitative interviews provide data only on the perspectives of those who participated in the evaluation. The qualitative data collected during the evaluation relies heavily on self-reported data from participants, which are vulnerable to biases such as social desirability bias. Whilst their perspective is valuable, and critical for the evaluation, it is not neutral and should be interpreted with caution. To partially mitigate this, the evaluation drew



on data from a range of independent reports, which included engagement with individuals and organisations who were not directly involved in programme design or delivery.

The J4N programme is a five-year initiative, which aims to create long-term environmental impacts. While the delivery of environmental outputs is observable, the anticipated environmental outcomes are not likely to be realised until the medium to long-term, and are not possible to capture within the timeframe of this evaluation.



2 J4N evaluation findings

This section provides a summary of the overall findings of the evaluation, framed under the criteria of effectiveness, relevance, additionality, coherence, and sustainability. The learning and improvement criterion is addressed in the ‘Learnings and implications’ section above.

2.1 Effectiveness of the J4N programme

2.1.1 Effectiveness in creating employment

Keeping people in the community employed and/or in training over the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery period was an important intended outcome of the J4N programme. Monitoring data on the J4N programme shows that the objective of 12,000 employment starts has been exceeded. As of December 2024, J4N created over 15,500 employment starts and over 12.5 million hours of work. Data on employment starts and J4N funding paid over time is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: J4N funding paid and employment starts

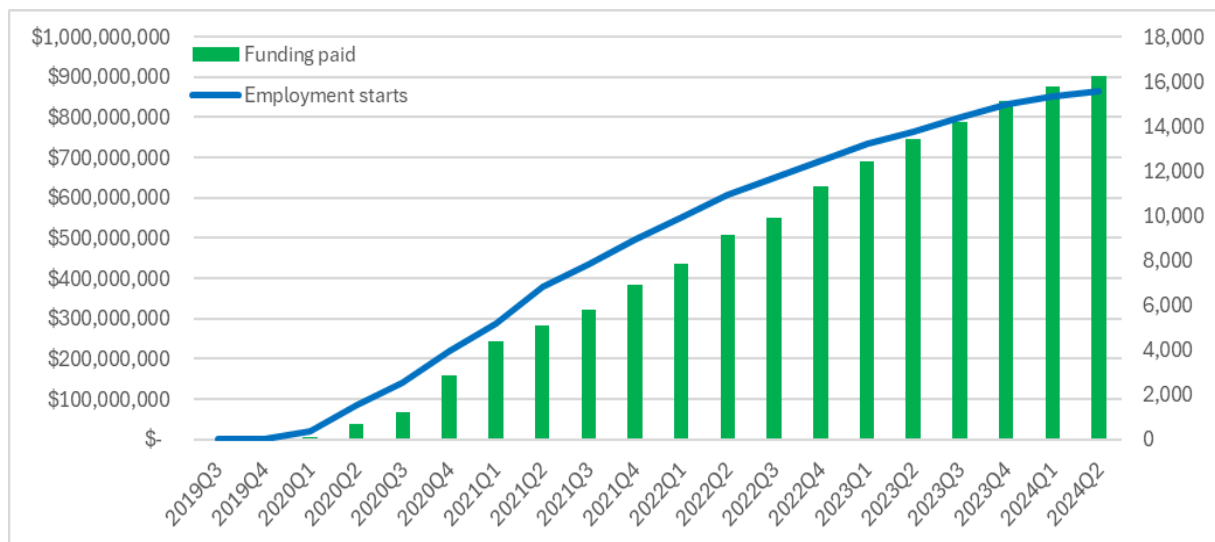


Figure 1 shows that the allocation of funding was relatively steady, while the number of employment starts increased rapidly until the end of the 2022 financial year and then plateaued.⁶ This likely reflects the initial focus on employment and projects swiftly building

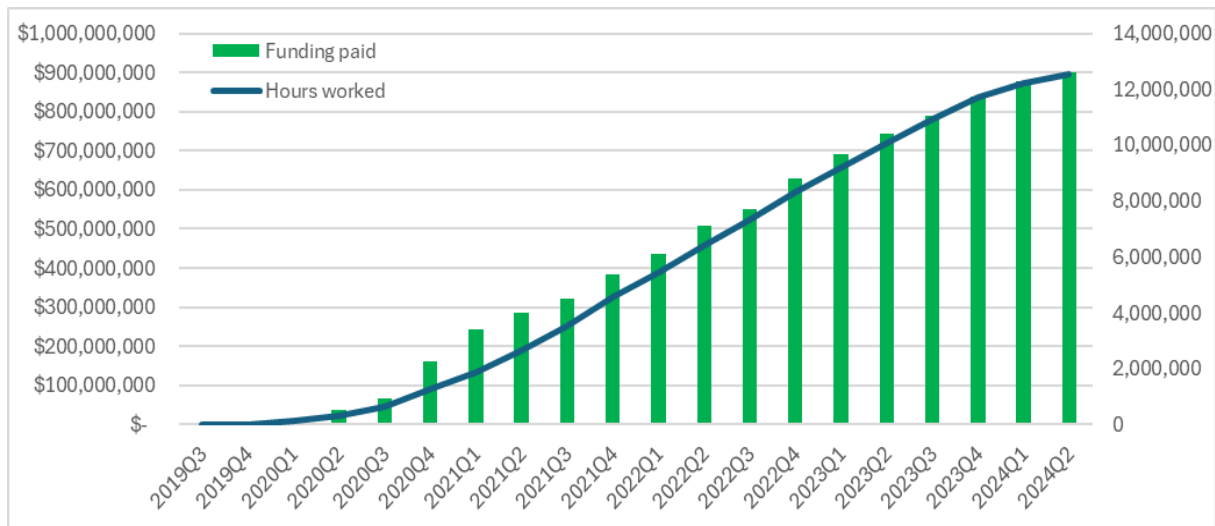
⁶ Employment starts is defined as “the number of employees working on a Jobs for Nature funded project who have started employment with an employer since the previous reference date i.e., since the previous month or quarter. An employment start is an employer-employee match, regardless of whether it is on full time or part-time basis, and it includes all employment types, including self-employed people and contractors. A job filled by a person employed on a casual contract is counted when the employment relationship begins, not each time the employee does some work under the casual contract.” (Jobs for Nature Data Template Guidance, April 2024).



capacity to deliver, with some projects beginning to wind up after 2023, while others were transitioning to business as usual.⁷

Analysis of total hours worked and J4N funding paid over time (Figure 2) shows that hours worked largely mirrored J4N investment apart from a lag in the last quarter of 2021.

Figure 2: J4N funding paid and hours worked



Combined, the employment starts and hours worked will have had a substantial impact on local economies through direct economic stimulation via wages, equipment/capital expenditure, and services.

Projects that created mana-enhancing employment opportunities for unemployed people were effective in creating social benefits

Engagement with personnel from projects that targeted recruitment towards historically disadvantaged populations stated that J4N had been a transformative influence in areas where there were few opportunities for meaningful work. Personnel from one hapū-based J4N project emphasised the importance of the programme in bringing purposeful work to the region, through to on the ground roles such as fencing, and weed and animal pest management.

“Most [of] our team had been doing hard mahi and seasonal labouring, and had no control over that work and nothing mana enhancing. This work is meaningful.” (J4N Project Manager, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2023a)

The provision of stable, meaningful and adequately paid employment was reported to have a range of social benefits, including increased economic stability, the ability to remain in the community, and greater overall wellbeing in whānau and communities (Allen and Clarke,

⁷ As at December 2024 a total of 286 projects (excluding administrative projects) were reported as complete with 217 still in delivery.

2024d). From a Te Ao Māori perspective, J4N was seen as an opportunity for rangatiratanga, with iwi and hapū being partners or leads in providing mana-enhancing work in their rohe.

“This has been able to create employment outcomes for those that did not have this opportunity in the past. This work is linked into self-determination, rangatiratanga.” (J4N project personnel, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

Interviewees in projects that focused on recruiting people that had experienced unemployment noted that wrap around support was vital to success, with many projects providing pastoral care and practical support such as transport to work (Allen and Clarke, 2023a). Evidence indicates that the additional cost and time involved in targeting projects to people who are unemployed is worth the investment, as these projects were associated with a higher social return on investment (SROI) than those that target under-employed or people who are looking to change work sector (ImpactLab, 2024).

2.1.2 Effectiveness in creating environmental benefits

J4N projects have delivered substantial environmental outputs

J4N projects have delivered substantial environmental outputs; however, the outcomes of these activities in terms of environmental improvements will take time to realise.

Monitoring data shows that the J4N investment enabled the delivery of environmental restoration activities at scale. As shown in the data presented in Figure 3 in Appendix B, as at December 2024 this included the remediation of 1,157 fish passages by moving or modifying barriers. Restoring fish passages helps re-establish the natural movement of indigenous freshwater fish species, such as tuna (eels) and inanga (whitebait). This was particularly important for many iwi and hapū-led J4N projects, who stated that remediating fish passages was an important part of restoring the mauri of waterways, which will support resumption of traditional activities, such as harvesting tuna (Allen and Clarke, 2023a).

Looking after waterways is also linked to our nutrition, and of course these all reside in the domains of atua. We look for kai we use to eat, what is missing and what is now present (tuna and fish counts).” (J4N project personnel, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

Other environmental outputs included almost 13,000,000 total plants reported as being planted as of December 2024 (see Figure 4 in Appendix B). J4N project stakeholders described changes that they had observed through these planting activities.

“I love the trees, growing them and filling the spaces with our taonga. Looking back at the thousands we have planted, that provides kai for the manu, bringing back the insects, helping clean the water.” (Hapū member quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024a)

Pest control was another key environmental output. By December 2024 over 3.4 million hectares had been treated for animal pest control (including 1.9 million hectares treated for wallabies and 1.1 million hectares treated for rats and mustelids), 700,000 hectares had been



treated for plant pest control⁸, and 2.1 million hectares treated for wilding conifer control (see Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7 respectively in Appendix B). Interviewees from J4N projects provided anecdotal observations of increased biodiversity in areas in which pest control activities had taken place, with reports of project kaimahi and the public seeing more birds, bats, and native plants (Allen and Clarke, 2023a).

“The air smells fresher...We are hearing more Kererū at Kitchener Park.” (J4N project personnel, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2023a)

Environmental benefits are expected but require time to fully materialise

It is difficult to conclusively determine the effectiveness of the programme in creating environmental impacts. The Year 3 evaluation report noted the challenges of demonstrating environmental outcomes within the programme's five-year timeframe, recognising that environmental restoration and recovery operate on much longer timescales (Allen and Clarke, 2025). The Kaipara Moana Restoration project exemplifies this temporal challenge, with some improvements like reduced sediment loads anticipated within 10 years, while full ecological restoration of the harbour system is projected to take 50-100 years (Ministry for the Environment, 2025b).

Despite the challenges in measuring environmental outcomes, J4N has delivered substantial outputs across its intervention areas. The programme has funded extensive native plantings, wetland restoration, pest control operations, and habitat enhancement activities throughout New Zealand. While it may be too early to fully quantify the environmental outcomes from these investments, the scale and nature of activities undertaken provides a strong foundation for expecting significant environmental benefits.

The activities funded through J4N represent well-established, scientifically supported methods for improving environmental outcomes. There is a robust body of scientific evidence demonstrating the environmental benefits of these intervention types, making it reasonable to infer that significant positive outcomes will accrue from the programme's investments. For example, native tree planting has been shown to deliver climate mitigation benefits (Buckley et al., 2023), while wetland restoration has been confirmed to improve ecosystem biodiversity and carbon sequestration (Tomscha et al., 2021). Given the scientific evidence base supporting these interventions and the substantial scale of activities delivered through J4N, it is reasonable to expect meaningful environmental benefits, even where comprehensive outcome measurement is not yet possible.

⁸ Calculated as the maximum area treated for any of the following pests: possum, rats and/or mustelids, goats, deer, wallabies, and other animal pests.

2.1.3 Economic effectiveness

The J4N programme is a cost-effective investment

An economic assessment conducted in 2024 calculated the benefit-to-cost ratio of the programme at 3.37.⁹ This indicates that for every dollar spent on J4N it is expected to generate \$3.37 in economic, environmental and wellbeing benefits (Martin Jenkins, 2024).

At the project level, limited economic assessment data was available for most projects. A cost-benefit analysis was undertaken for the Kaipara Moana Remediation project, which is a flagship initiative under the J4N programme with around \$200 million investment. This found that every dollar spent is expected to generate \$3.94 in economic, environmental and wellbeing benefits (Ministry for the Environment, 2025b).

However, these two benefit-cost ratios are not directly comparable as they were calculated using different methodologies and assumptions. Therefore, the higher ratio for Kaipara Moana Remediation should not be interpreted as indicating superior performance compared to the overall programme average.

The cost-benefit analysis of the full J4N programme found that the 'payback period' for the investments is 5.279 years. This refers to the time required to recover the initial investment through the benefits generated (Martin Jenkins, 2024). This highlights the importance of long-term planning and commitment when investing in projects aimed at addressing environmental challenges, as the benefits may take several years to fully materialise (Ministry for the Environment, 2024).

2.1.4 Te Ao Māori perspectives of J4N effectiveness

The J4N programme provided the government with a mechanism to fulfil its Treaty obligations

The programme was described as representing an opportunity for the Crown to deliver on its Treaty of Waitangi obligations by working with Māori to support the exercise of kawanatanga and kaitiakitanga over their whenua (Allen and Clarke, 2024b). The evaluation found mixed views among iwi, hapū, and Māori organisations regarding the extent to which this had been achieved through the programme.

Some iwi and hapū-based organisations that received J4N funding viewed it as an opportunity to transform the relationship between the Crown and iwi or hapū. Personnel from some iwi-led projects highlighted that J4N enabled them to carry out much-needed work on lands returned through Treaty settlements. The programme funded the restoration of lakes, wetlands, and walkways, which were perceived to have been neglected by Crown agencies (Allen and Clarke, 2024b).

⁹ An updated economic assessment using all programme data is being undertaken and its results are anticipated to be available in late 2025



“We were able to use J4N to finally do work that we wanted to do for 25 years...J4N is one of the first meaningful and authentic partnerships with the funding to do anything.” (Iwi member quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

Some J4N projects have complemented Te Tiriti o Waitangi settlements by kick-starting the capacity of iwi to deliver on Deed of Settlement aspirations. The evaluation found that the programme helped delivery on Crown agencies’ obligations to support iwi aspirations for rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. Some iwi and Māori organisations spoke about the transformative opportunities that J4N provided, supporting iwi as Rangatira over their whenua and contributing towards active kaitiakitanga as mana whenua (Allen and Clarke, 2024b).

Despite these successes, other iwi and Māori organisations felt that the partnership with the Crown was somewhat one-sided and that the scale of the J4N investment was insufficient given the extent of environmental degradation and historical neglect of the whenua.

“A small attempt at meeting tino rangatiratanga by the Crown. A subtle approach, a drop in the ocean of what needs to be done.” (Iwi member quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

The programme contributed to enhanced wellbeing across the domains of Te Whare Tapa Whā

Overall, the evaluation found that the J4N programme has been effective in enhancing the spiritual, physical, mental, and whānau wellbeing of iwi and hapū (Allen and Clarke, 2024b).

The programme has positively impacted the Te Taha Wairua (spiritual wellbeing) by improving the mauri of people and places, fostering connections that uplift the wairua. Interviews with personnel from iwi-led projects placed great value on reconnecting "back home" and the opportunity to restore places that are taonga. The programme provided a chance to reconnect with the whenua, which lifted wairua.

“There are healing outcomes from this work for those involved. Being able to maintain traditional knowledge.” (J4N Project Manager, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

Personnel from iwi and Māori-led J4N projects identified benefits in the Te Taha Tinana domain, such as the improved physical health experienced by kaimahi.

“[The project is] getting the kaumātua moving where they might not have been before. [We] also have families who join in this space, meeting their hauora outcomes.” (J4N Project Manager, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

In addition, Te Taha Tinana was supported through restoration of traditional places to gather food, such as fishing, which supplemented the diet of iwi members and facilitated a reconnection with their waterways.

Iwi representatives discussed the broader Te Taha Hinengaro (mental wellbeing) benefits that whānau experienced through working in nature restoration and the taiao. The connection to



nature made participants feel proud to be involved in these projects, contributing to their overall sense of wellbeing.

“Building confidence in their team members, giving them a sense of purpose and the ability to be strong in themselves.” (J4N Project Manager, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024b)

The programme also supported whānau wellbeing (Te Taha Whānau) by providing a steady income flow for some households in times of employment uncertainty. Māori tourism benefitted from the J4N support to enhance tourism assets such as ecosanctuaries and nature-based tourism experiences, creating new business opportunities and sources of income (Allen and Clarke, 2024b).

Working in J4N projects in environments that iwi and hapū once owned and lived in began a deep process of reconnection. The ability for whānau to reconnect with their whenua and whakapapa has strengthened their iwi, hapū, and whānau identity, enabling them to care for their taonga tuku iho (Allen and Clarke, 2024b).

A Critical Tiriti Analysis found the programme performed well on Wairuatanga and was inconsistent in its performance against the Preamble, Kāwantanga, Rangatiratanga and Ōritetanga

The evaluation used a Critical Tiriti Analysis methodology to undertake an analysis of the findings against the five elements of the Treaty of Waitangi: Preamble, Kāwantanga, Rangatiratanga, Ōritetanga, and Wairuatanga (Allen and Clarke, 2024b). The analysis aimed to determine the extent to which these elements were upheld based on the experiences of Māori organisations, iwi and hapū, project personnel, and kaimahi that participated in the J4N programme.

The Preamble considered whether Māori had a say in J4N policy development, funding decisions, and the implementation model. The evaluation found that Māori and Iwi organisations were neither equal nor lead partners in J4N planning or funding allocation decision-making. However, there were two notable exceptions. Firstly, the work done in Te Tau Ihu under the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance, a pre-existing entity that provided significant input into J4N planning in the region (while Crown agencies retained final funding decision-making authority). This group demonstrated excellence by having Māori experienced in Treaty negotiations lead the DOC partnership side, ensuring all iwi in the region were involved. This high level of cultural literacy and correct tikanga ensured everyone's mana was intact, enabling a cohesive approach to J4N in the region. The second exception was the MfE Te Mana o te Wai capacity and capability building fund. Iwi played a key role in the planning for how this fund would be used in Te Tai Tokerau, determining how their Te Mana o te Wai grant could best be distributed amongst their own hapū (Allen and Clarke, 2024b).

The assessment of Kāwantanga examined the extent to which J4N agencies had policy documentation supporting Māori and iwi. It found that DOC had empowering policies that resonated with Māori communities such as Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020, which recognizes the Crown's responsibility to engage with iwi, hapū, and whānau. However, J4N was not population-specific, and Māori were often left



without tailored support or recognition of their unique needs and perspectives within the broader policy framework. The bulk of J4N funding for Māori was provided by DOC, Kānoa, and MPI, but the prescribed nature of the funding limited innovation and flexibility to meet Māori community needs.

An assessment of Rangatiratanga found that Māori were not partners or leaders in the design, planning, and evaluation of J4N. Instead, Māori and iwi were included alongside other sector groups in an advisory role without decision-making powers. While Māori involvement at the national level was largely advisory, Māori were leaders and partners in the implementation of many J4N projects. At the project level, J4N upheld Māori self-determination, supporting Māori development, cultural affirmation, and greater autonomy in delivering environmental outcomes.

In considering Ōritetanga, the analysis found that J4N provided substantial investment into Māori and iwi organisations. However, the evaluation found a perception that inequities remained between some iwi and hapū, with some receiving funding while others did not. While this reflects that demand significantly exceeded the available J4N funding,¹⁰ some iwi and hapū considered the basis for funding decisions to be opaque. The experience of Māori could have been improved through greater transparency in decision-making. Where iwi and Māori projects received funding, they reported gains in working in the taiao, supporting Ōritetanga by restoring their whenua.

The analysis found that Māori benefited in the Wairuatanga domain of the Critical Tiriti Analysis assessment, nurturing connections to whenua, whānau, hapu, iwi and whakapapa.

2.1.5 Factors that supported the effective implementation of J4N

Effective cross-agency collaboration supported the delivery of the programme

Strong governance and coordination structures enabled effective cross-government collaboration. The evaluation found that J4N's cross-government approach was mostly effective, successfully enhancing strategic collaboration and reducing overlaps between agency funding streams. Key structural elements that supported this success included the SLU Ministers' group for strategic oversight, an independent Reference Group (later Advisory Group) providing external advice and investment assurance, and a Deputy Chief Executives Group that acted as the 'engine room' for establishing collaboration.

The programme's scale, urgency, and shared objectives created powerful incentives for collaboration. The substantial scale of J4N funding, combined with the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic context and shared Investment Framework principles,¹¹ provided sufficient motivation for agencies to actively work across traditional silos. Most government agency

¹⁰ For example, DOC's four contestable funds receiving applications worth \$800 million against \$258 million available; for MfE funds the demand exceed available funding by 4-15 times

¹¹ The Investment Framework specified four overarching assessment principles: Employment, Environmental, Organisation and Partnerships, and Financial and Delivery.



interview participants characterised J4N as the most successful cross-agency programme they had been involved in, noting how these factors aligned to make the cross-agency model work effectively.

Dedicated coordination mechanisms facilitated agency alignment and knowledge sharing. The independent Secretariat, based at MfE, played a critical coordination role in aligning agencies, preventing duplication, and providing essential programme-level support including reporting frameworks and single-line communication to Ministers (Ministry for the Environment, 2023a). Interagency committees focusing on specific aspects such as risk assessment, benefits measurement, and programme transition further enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing amongst personnel across the five agencies.

Maintaining agency autonomy within the collaborative framework preserved specialist expertise. Stakeholders considered the retention of agency autonomy over individual funding streams important, as this allowed agencies to leverage their specialised expertise whilst contributing to shared J4N goals. This approach enabled agencies to pursue their core mandates while advancing shared objectives under the programme umbrella.

Strong leadership commitment and the urgent imperative to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the large amount of funding available, proved essential for overcoming traditional silos. The programme demonstrated that cross-agency collaboration can be highly effective when supported by leadership commitment, appropriate structures, substantial investment, and compelling incentives to work beyond traditional agency boundaries. However, some limitations in achieving fully integrated collaboration remained due to systemic barriers, including separate Ministerial accountability structures and Treasury restrictions on consolidating multiple funding categories into a single appropriation (Treasury, 2013).

The procurement approach was largely effective in enabling rapid programme implementation

The evaluation found that agencies successfully accelerated fund deployment by scaling existing programmes and leveraging established relationships with trusted partners. Key elements that supported this effectiveness included building on proven delivery models with existing business cases, utilising established partners with strong track records such as iwi, regional councils and experienced NGOs, and adopting flexible procurement processes that deviated from standard approaches to enable "shovel-ready" project deployment.

While the high-trust, flexible approach enabled rapid deployment of environmental projects and job creation initiatives, it created difficulties in adapting to emerging needs once contracts were established. The speed of initial contracting resulted in some projects being inadequately scoped or priced, with insufficient allowance for inflation impacts on materials and fuel costs. This demonstrates the ongoing challenge of balancing the urgency of crisis response with the need for flexible and adaptable contracting in multi-year government programmes.



Capacity building was effective in delivering both immediate and long-term programme benefits

The programme's initial focus on rapid job creation proved effective in providing immediate employment amongst workers displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Early projects successfully redeployed workers from pandemic-affected sectors, particularly tourism, into conservation roles that leveraged their existing relevant skills. This approach enabled rapid workforce deployment in entry-level tasks such as wilding conifer control, trapping, and track maintenance, while exposing more people to conservation work and developing transferable skills.

The programme's evolution toward longer-term skill development delivered substantial capacity building outcomes at scale. Following the ministerial directive in June 2021 to prioritise capability building, almost 70% of J4N projects included capability development objectives, with nearly 5,000 people receiving formal training and over 2,000 NZQA credits earned.

The programme achieved success in building sustainable iwi and hapū capacity for environmental management of their whenua. Evidence indicates that skills and qualifications gained through J4N created ongoing employment opportunities and enabled Māori to exercise greater autonomy in managing their whenua and environmental resources, such as through the development of iwi taiao units. This approach proved particularly effective in creating enduring capability that extends beyond the programme's lifetime, with iwi teams now delivering cost-effective, high-quality environmental services that are contracted by local and regional councils.

Networks and partnerships were enablers of successful J4N project delivery

The evaluation found that the most successful projects in terms of job creation and environmental impact actively established partnerships with diverse stakeholders including central and local government, iwi, Māori organisations, landowners, and farming communities. For example, projects that included partnerships with scientific organisations enhanced technical capacity in innovative land management approaches, and regional council partnerships were valuable in facilitating access to additional resources and expertise while aligning project goals with regional environmental priorities.

Meaningful iwi and Māori partnerships were identified as a key factor in achieving long-term project impacts. The evaluation found that projects led by or partnered with iwi and Māori organisations incorporated holistic environmental management principles. For example, some iwi approached J4N work from a 'maunga through to waterways' perspective that considered entire catchments and ecosystems. This integrated environmental stewardship with cultural values and long-term sustainability goals, with iwi viewing J4N as part of a broader system of ecosystem kaitiakitanga. Projects with strong iwi leadership demonstrated greater likelihood of sustained environmental resilience, as well as broader cultural reconnection benefits.



Effective programme implementation requires a foundation of consistent, well-designed data and reporting systems

The J4N programme's rapid deployment meant that the majority of standardised metrics across the five participating agencies were not agreed until well into programme delivery in December 2020 (and some were added later). Prior to this, each agency operated with different data requirements and reporting systems, leading to unnecessary complexity that prevented development of a comprehensive programme-wide view.

Once standardised employment metrics were developed, they proved beneficial for supporting accountability. Although the Secretariat made iterative adjustments to reporting requirements, including reducing reporting frequency from monthly to quarterly, which helped address the reporting burden for contracted J4N projects, programme monitoring would have been more effective if programme-level reporting requirements had been agreed early in the process. This would ensure that all stakeholders have a shared understanding of what data needs to be collected and reported.

2.1.6 Unanticipated results

The J4N programme generated spillover benefits beyond its core objectives

The evaluation identified several unintended benefits that extended the programme's value beyond direct employment and environmental outcomes. The programme developed emergency response capacity, with practical skills from conservation work proving transferable during the extreme weather events in early 2023. Jobs for Nature crews featured in flood-stricken areas, providing civil defence support and assistance in clearing trees and rebuilding fences, demonstrating how environmental workforce development can build community resilience for emergency situations.

The programme also created business opportunities. In particular, iwi and hapū organisations reported that capacity building developed through J4N led to professional service capabilities that generated ongoing employment opportunities. This includes technical expertise in areas such as environmental monitoring and restoration, with evidence of regional and local councils maintaining ongoing contracts after the programme, creating sustainable business-as-usual operations.

There is evidence that J4N created enduring collaborative relationships beyond its original scope. While most Regional Partnership Groups did not continue formally, the relationships formed built strong foundations for sustained collaboration, with ongoing projects between government, regional councils, and iwi supported by connections developed through the programme. These enduring networks have facilitated new joint initiatives in environmental management, with stakeholders leveraging the trust and working relationships established during J4N to pursue shared conservation objectives.

2.2 Relevance

Overall, the design and implementation of the J4N programme have successfully aligned with its policy intent and objectives, demonstrating strong stakeholder support and adaptability. The initial objectives and scope have remained relevant, with the programme effectively adjusting to changing economic and environmental circumstances over its lifetime.

The design and implementation of the J4N programme aligned well with its policy intent and objectives

The three overarching objectives continue to have strong endorsement from stakeholders, including the five government agencies involved, who agree that J4N is effectively improving the environment and creating employment opportunities. The high-level nature of the objectives has allowed the programme to remain relevant and adaptable to changing circumstances, with strong regional endorsement further demonstrating alignment with the programme's intent.

“The balance between the emphasis on objectives shifted, but all three remained relevant throughout the life of the programme.” (National stakeholder, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024a)

As has been discussed above, J4N focused on job creation to address rising unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting its focus in mid-2021 to place greater emphasis on environmental outcomes. This shift was reported to be supported by the broad policy objectives, which remained unchanged, allowing for flexibility in programme delivery. The five government agencies implemented the shift in focus differently, reflecting their unique mandates and regional priorities. For example, Kānoa and LINZ retained a strong focus on employment, while MPI and DOC placed greater emphasis on environmental outcomes over time (Allen and Clarke, 2023a).

The programme's objectives remained relevant to regional and iwi priorities, with projects tailored to local contexts.

“[It’s] been a blend, balancing social outcomes for employment and training and raising the capacity and capability of conservation workforce along with achieving conservation outcomes.” (J4N project personnel, quoted in Allen and Clarke 2024a)

The programme's flexibility allowed it to adapt to regional needs and priorities effectively. Projects placed varying degrees of emphasis on creating employment opportunities, building resilience to climate change, and supporting iwi capacity building to ensure delivery remained relevant to regional or organisational priorities. For instance, in Auckland, many projects focused on creating employment opportunities where they were needed most, while in the Manawatū-Whanganui region, there was a strong focus on iwi capacity building (Allen and Clarke, 2023b; Allen and Clarke, 2023d).



2.3 Additionality

The J4N programme leveraged additional investment beyond the core Crown funding allocation

Analysis of programme funding data shows that J4N attracted substantial co-funding from both Crown and non-Crown sources (Table 4). This indicates that the programme was effective in mobilising broader investment in environmental restoration and employment creation.

Table 4: J4N Crown funding and additional funding sources

Funding stream	Cash funding	In kind funding
J4N Crown (total)	\$1,177,939,834.53	\$45,600.00
Non-Crown	\$202,759,056.05	\$76,375,429.97
Other Crown	\$32,846,416.23	\$1,225,251.52
Grand Total	\$1,413,545,306.81	\$77,646,281.49

As shown, the total programme investment reached \$1.49 billion. Of this total investment, J4N Crown funding of \$1.18 billion (comprised of cash and in-kind funding) was supplemented by an additional \$310 million in co-funding from other sources, representing a leverage ratio of approximately 26 cents for every dollar of J4N Crown funding invested.

The programme's success in securing significant co-funding indicates that J4N motivated stakeholders to invest their own resources in pursuing common environmental and employment goals. This additional investment provided added value, that likely enabled greater scale and impact than would have been achieved through Crown funding alone.

The J4N programme added value over and above the direct investment of funds

Notably, the programme contributed significant skills and capacity to help communities respond and build resilience to climate change related extreme weather events. For example, through the experience gained from J4N projects, the J4N workforce became a significant source of practical support to communities following the Cyclone Gabrielle flooding (Allen and Clarke, 2024a).

*“Jobs for Nature crews featured heavily in flood-stricken areas, providing civil defence [and] some much needed help in clearing trees and rebuilding fences.”
 (J4N Project Manager quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2024a)*

The programme provided additional value through the ability to adopt alternative workforce models. The accessible employment provided by some J4N projects has supported communities to develop greater conservation capacity to take on other nature-based contracts with Crown agencies and local government (Allen and Clarke, 2023a).



The Year 2 evaluation provides evidence that the programme had spillover benefits in stimulating local economies. This was due to people having more money in their pockets to spend at local businesses, and through J4N projects purchasing equipment and services from local suppliers.

“When the team is finished their four days in the bush they come back in and buy goodies from the local shops here...It all makes a difference.” (J4N Project Manager, quoted from Allen and Clarke, 2024a)

J4N funding has supported the creation of tools, models and partnerships that will add value beyond the life of the programme

The programme enabled investment in technology that enhanced efficiencies in environmental work, such as managing plant and animal pests (Allen and Clarke, 2023a). This included innovative methods for ecosystem restoration, like the release of dung beetles to improve water quality and the development of lake weed mats from harakeke (Allen and Clarke, 2024a).

The J4N funding provided an opportunity to develop nature-based solutions that integrated mātauranga Māori. Examples included developing resources to protect kauri by providing tikanga to educate visitors on how to protect the mauri of the forest, and creating innovative approaches to manage plant and animal pests.

“We have discovered more effective ways to manage the moth plant that could lead to its eradication.” (J4N project personnel, quoted in Allen and Clarke, 2023a)

Additional benefits were also seen through the development of new workforce sharing models to support business continuity in the event of situations like the recent pandemic. For example, J4N projects enabled tourism business workers to pivot into other roles throughout the tourism downturn (Allen and Clarke, 2023a). This model was tested for its potential for extension, which identified that it had strong potential to work effectively in other regions with both tourism industries and proximity to the conservation estate (Allen and Clarke, 2023e)

Social procurement approaches delivered additional community benefits

The programme effectively leveraged social procurement approaches to deliver additional community benefits beyond core environmental and employment outcomes. Agencies, particularly DOC, Kānoa and LINZ, successfully integrated social value considerations into their procurement decisions by prioritising project applications that included features such as use of local suppliers, embedded pastoral care provisions, or training and career development opportunities. This approach proved particularly valuable in building long-term capacity within iwi and community organisations.

However, this approach also created increased contract management overhead and required intensive support for less experienced organisations to meet government compliance standards.



A small-scale social return on investment analysis of four J4N projects suggested that targeting unemployed individuals rather than those who are underemployed or looking to change sectors may deliver higher social returns. The analysis found that unemployed individuals, who often face greater barriers to employment, benefit more substantially from the opportunities provided by J4N projects, thereby enhancing the overall social impact of the programme (ImpactLab, 2024). However, this finding was based on a limited sample and focused on social outcomes rather than the programme's primary environmental objectives. While not generalisable across the broader programme, this analysis highlights the potential value of considering participant employment status when designing similar initiatives.

The programme accelerated and scaled up conservation work beyond business-as-usual funding

Determining how much of the J4N programme's outcomes would have occurred anyway or been funded through other mechanisms is challenging without formal counterfactual analysis, though evidence suggests that there was some additionality in environmental outcomes. Many J4N projects addressed conservation work that agencies and organisations had identified as priorities but lacked resources to implement at scale (Allen and Clarke, 2023a; Allen and Clarke, 2024a). While some activities such as basic pest control maintenance might have continued through existing baseline funding, the programme enabled delivery at a scale and pace far exceeding what would have been possible through standard budgets. In this way, the programme converted identified but unfunded conservation and environmental management needs into active projects, suggesting additionality in terms of scope and timeline acceleration.

The increased investment also meant that the programme created employment opportunities that would not have existed through standard labour market mechanisms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. J4N generated positions in the conservation and environmental sectors where employment creation was typically limited by funding availability rather than skills demand or labour supply.

2.4 Coherence

J4N project selection was coherent with national strategies, but was less consistently coherent with regional needs

The selection of J4N projects demonstrated coherence with both regional and national needs and strategies (Allen and Clarke, 2023a; Allen and Clarke, 2024a). Interviews with personnel from the five government agencies involved indicated that project selection aimed to reflect a mixture of regional, catchment, and national environmental needs. This included projects that complemented or extended existing initiatives, such as projects on whenua Māori, freshwater improvement initiatives, climate resilience efforts, and land and river management activities.

Evidence from interviews with J4N project personnel and stakeholders indicated that J4N projects aligned well with national strategies and priorities, such as the National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA), Aotearoa's biodiversity strategy *Te Mana o te Taiao*, and MfE's Essential Freshwater reforms and National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management.



At the regional level, the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance in Te Tau Ihu/top of the South Island exemplified effective collaboration and project synergies. The alliance planned J4N delivery on a landscape scale, involving iwi in the selection and delivery of projects through co-governance (Allen and Clarke, 2023c). This collective approach reduced duplication and enhanced programme effectiveness. In contrast, regions like Auckland and Manawatū-Whanganui experienced less coordination. This led to concerns about potential duplication of efforts and a lack of coherent planning around activities such as native plant nursery development and pest management (Allen and Clarke, 2023b; Allen and Clarke, 2023d).

The job creation aspect of the J4N programme was well-aligned with other initiatives

The job creation element of the J4N programme was coherent with other support measures, avoiding duplication and leveraging existing initiatives. The evaluation found that J4N projects reflected national and regional needs for employment without replicating other job creation or employment support measures. Some job creation efforts aligned with and built on other regional investment programmes, such as the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF). There were no reported instances of displacement or duplication of other training support programmes (Allen and Clarke, 2023a; Allen and Clarke, 2024a).

In regions like Te Tau Ihu, the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance facilitated coherence across funding programmes, ensuring that J4N projects complemented existing efforts. This included leveraging investments from the PGF and aligning with the Ngā Awa river restoration programme. The collaborative planning and transparency within the alliance enabled the scaling of conservation work and employment opportunities, enhancing the overall impact of the programme (Allen and Clarke, 2023c).

However, in other regions, the lack of regional coordination led to projects operating in a more self-contained manner. This raised concerns about potential duplication of efforts and missed opportunities for collaboration. For example, in Manawatū-Whanganui, funding recipients noted the absence of regional coherence compared to neighbouring regions like Hawkes Bay, where regular meetings and transparent communication facilitated better coordination (Allen and Clarke, 2023d).

Overall, the J4N programme's job creation element was coherent with other support measures, particularly in regions with strong collaborative frameworks. However, the effectiveness of this coherence varied across regions, highlighting the importance of regional coordination and transparent decision-making to maximise the programme's impact.

2.5 Sustainability

There are positive signs that J4N outcomes will be sustainable

The Year 3 evaluation found the J4N programme is likely to have positive environmental outcome sustainability prospects, although determining long-term impacts remains complex due to the inherent challenges of assessing conservation outcomes within short timeframes (Allen and Clarke, 2025). The natural time lag between conservation activities and measurable outcomes means that programme data primarily captured outputs rather than longer-term



environmental benefits, but this reflects ecological timescales rather than programme limitations.

The programme strategically funded well-established, scientifically supported conservation methods with robust evidence bases for delivering environmental benefits, providing confidence in the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes. Importantly, many projects undertook sustainability planning, with iwi-led initiatives particularly engaging in succession planning and viewing their work as long-term intergenerational investments. While some organisations treated funding more as one-time grants without extensive continuity plans, the programme's overall foundation of proven conservation methods and committed stewardship approaches suggests good sustainability prospects.

In terms of employment outcomes, the programme's strategic shift in emphasis from immediate job creation to longer-term environmental benefits and capacity building enhanced sustainability prospects by channelling funding into roles with greater career development potential. Early evidence suggests many participants have been sought after, transitioning to permanent employment or securing contract work across private sector, council, and DOC roles, with training and diverse work experience proving instrumental in creating these pathways (Allen and Clarke, 2023a; Allen and Clarke, 2024a).

Barriers to sustainability include ongoing pollution of waterways and low levels of investment in conservation

The evaluation identified several key factors influencing the sustainability of J4N project outcomes. One of the primary barriers is pollution, particularly in regions like Manawatū-Whanganui, where ongoing contamination of waterways significantly impacts local ecosystems and community activities. For instance, iwi-led projects in this region have faced difficulties in sustaining environmental gains due to polluted waterways where Māori gather kai. The presence of botulism outbreaks and fungal contamination in rivers further complicates these efforts. In contrast, projects in less polluted areas, such as Te Tau Ihu, benefit from large DOC reserves and smaller human populations, making it easier to maintain their environmental improvements (Allen and Clarke, 2023a).

Another significant barrier is the historical underinvestment in nature, which presents substantial challenges to achieving sustainability. The evaluation found that the sector's previous lack of adequate funding has made it difficult to sustain environmental efforts at the scale initially supported by J4N funding. This underinvestment has resulted in limited resources and infrastructure, hindering the ability to maintain and expand environmental initiatives. Projects that initially thrived under J4N funding are struggling to continue their activities and achieve long-term environmental goals without additional financial support (Allen and Clarke, 2023a; Allen and Clarke, 2024a). For example, some projects need additional funding rounds to manage pest plants and animals effectively and consolidate other environmental gains. Despite proactive efforts to secure alternative funding, many projects have struggled to attract support beyond the initial J4N investment (Allen and Clarke, 2024a).



Enablers of project sustainability include investing in established organisations, building capacity, fostering environmental stewardship, and building collaborative networks

Established projects with prior experience in environmental restoration are more likely to sustain their work, as they can build on existing initiatives and continue to upskill and secure additional contracts. Conversely, new organisations and communities without prior experience in environmental restoration face significant challenges in developing their service delivery capabilities, making sustainability more difficult to achieve.

Investment in capacity building has been an enabler for the sustainability of J4N projects. Training and upskilling efforts have created a skilled workforce capable of undertaking nature-based restoration work. This investment will support the sustainability of environmental outcomes if the workforce remains engaged.

Additionally, fostering a culture of kaitiakitanga (stewardship) through community engagement has long-term potential to sustain benefits. Projects have reported that community members continue to participate in voluntary activities like weeding and planting, indicating a lasting impact on environmental stewardship. This intergenerational engagement ensures that the benefits of J4N projects extend beyond the funding period.

Building strong networks and alliances has also been an important enabler for the sustainability of J4N projects. Projects that connect with existing regional and council work programmes feel more confident about their sustainability. The development of a national community of practice and platforms like the Tūhono Taiao Connecting to Communities website aim to foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and access to resources. These initiatives support the sustainability of J4N projects by enabling projects to share resources, access future funding streams, and collaborate on innovative approaches to environmental restoration.

J4N's structuring effects demonstrate the potential for sustainable cross-agency collaboration, with appropriate institutional support

The J4N programme demonstrated structuring effects on inter-agency collaboration (i.e., lasting changes to institutional relationships and collaborative practices that persist beyond the programme's completion). These structuring effects established innovative cross-agency structures, including the SLU Ministers' group, Deputy Chief Executives Group, independent Secretariat, and specialised interagency committees, that enabled systematic collaboration across traditional agency boundaries. Government agency representatives stated that programme created lasting institutional knowledge and capabilities, with agencies adopting successful practices from their counterparts, including procurement approaches and electronic reporting systems that have been integrated into their ongoing operations.

However, the long-term sustainability of these structuring effects faces challenges. The programme's structural innovations were prompted by compelling incentives (substantial funding, political urgency, and shared Investment Framework principles) that may not persist in business-as-usual government operations. Agency representatives expressed concerns



that without similar scale investments or unifying frameworks, there is risk of reverting to siloed operations within individual mandates and accountability structures.

While J4N demonstrated that effective inter-agency working is achievable when appropriate structural conditions exist, maintaining these collaborative approaches requires ongoing institutional commitment, aligned incentive structures, and dedicated coordination mechanisms that extend beyond programme-specific arrangements. The sustainability of these structuring effects will depend on whether the collaborative capabilities developed through J4N can be embedded into standard agency operating procedures.

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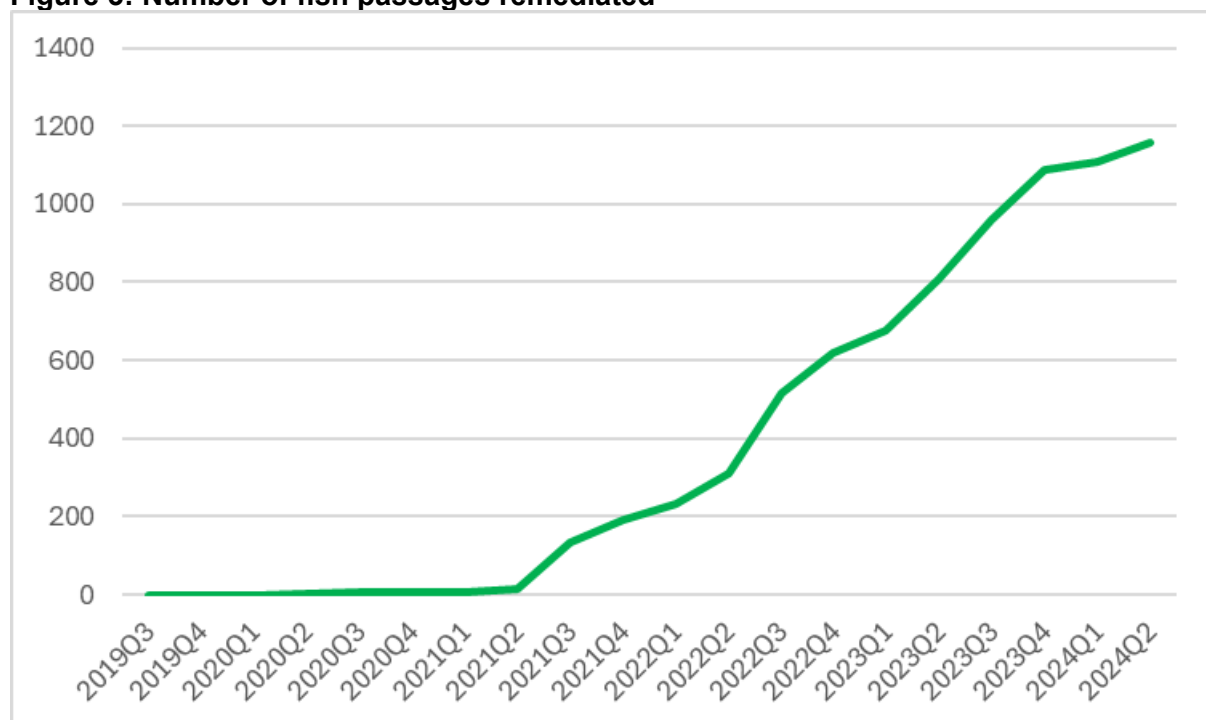
Appendix B: Environmental outputs

Analysis of J4N monitoring data on environmental outputs delivered through the programme are provided below.

Remediating fish passages

Figure 3 presents the number of fish passages remediated under the J4N programme. As shown, this metric saw little activity in the first two years of the programme, with substantial acceleration of fish passage remediation from 2022. Because there were only 31 projects reporting on these metrics, the large increase shows the influence of a small number of projects placing more emphasis on this work and reporting on the remediation of a large number of fish passages. As with many of the reported metrics, this may also reflect the emphasis on employment in the early days of the J4N programme and the need for many programmes to initially build capacity to deliver contracted outcomes.

Figure 3: Number of fish passages remediated



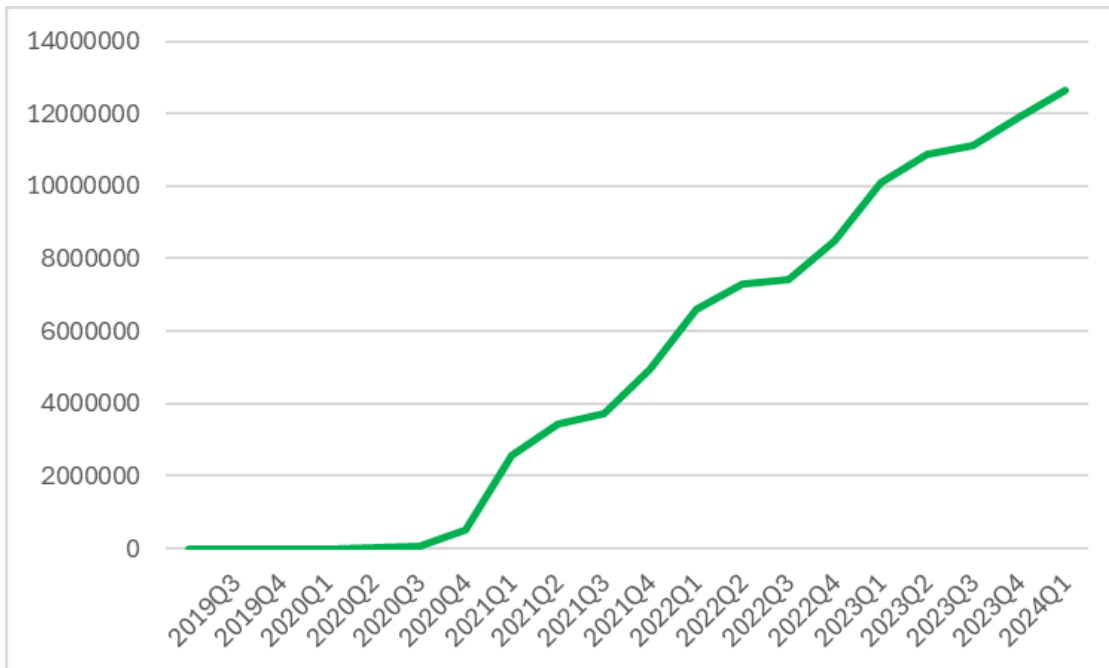
Plantings

Figure 4 shows that almost 13 million plants¹² were reported as being planted as of December 2024. This shows a pattern of steady planting, with some seasonal variation in the last quarter of each year where less planting was typically done.

¹² Sum of three metrics, these being the number of plants planted in riparian, lake, or wetland areas; total trees planted; and other plants planted.



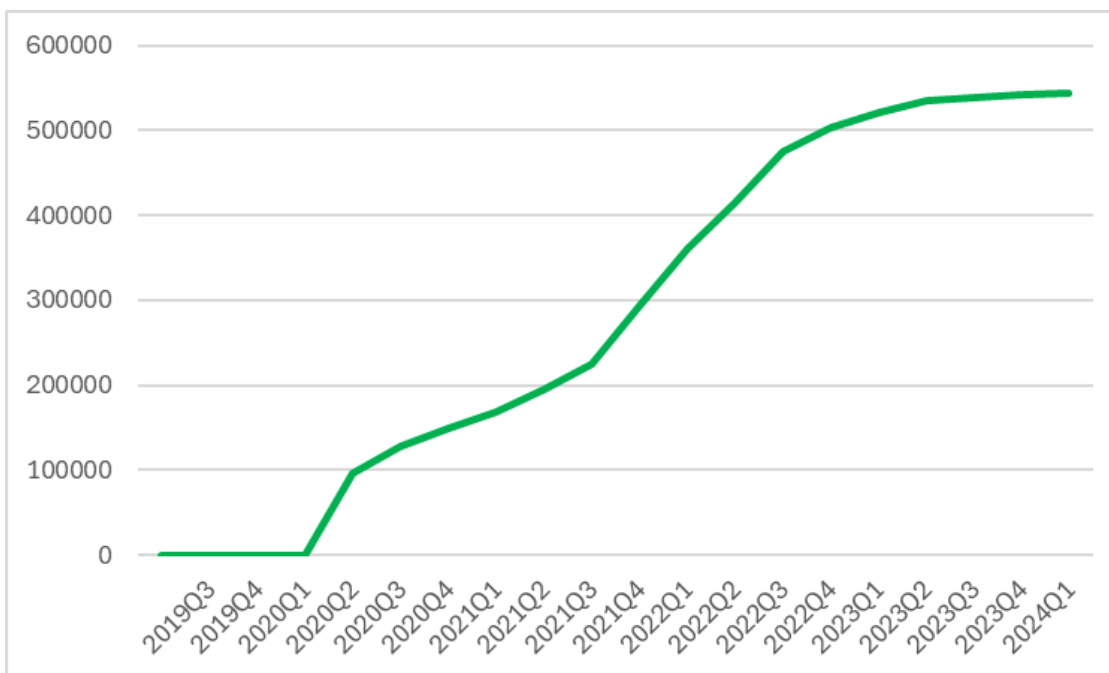
Figure 4: Number of J4N plantings



Pest control

Figure 5 shows a pattern of swiftly increasing animal pest control occurring between 2021 and 2022 before a steady rise from early 2023¹³.

Figure 5: Hectares treated for animal pests



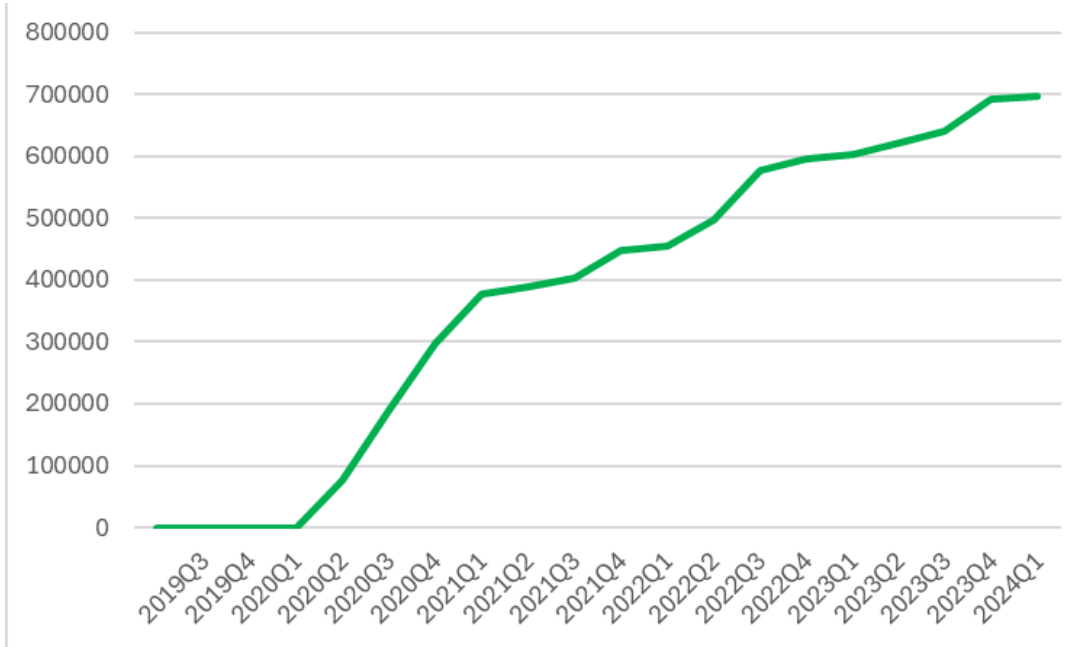
¹³ Calculated as the maximum area treated for any of the following pests: possum, rats and/or mustelids, goats, deer, wallabies, and other animal pests.



Total area treated for weeds

Figure 6 shows that the total hectares treated weeds totalling 696,000 hectares. Similar to efforts to eliminate animal pests, there was a lag early in the programmes, ramping up swiftly in mid-2021, before stabilising mid-2022 and continuing to eliminate weeds thereafter.

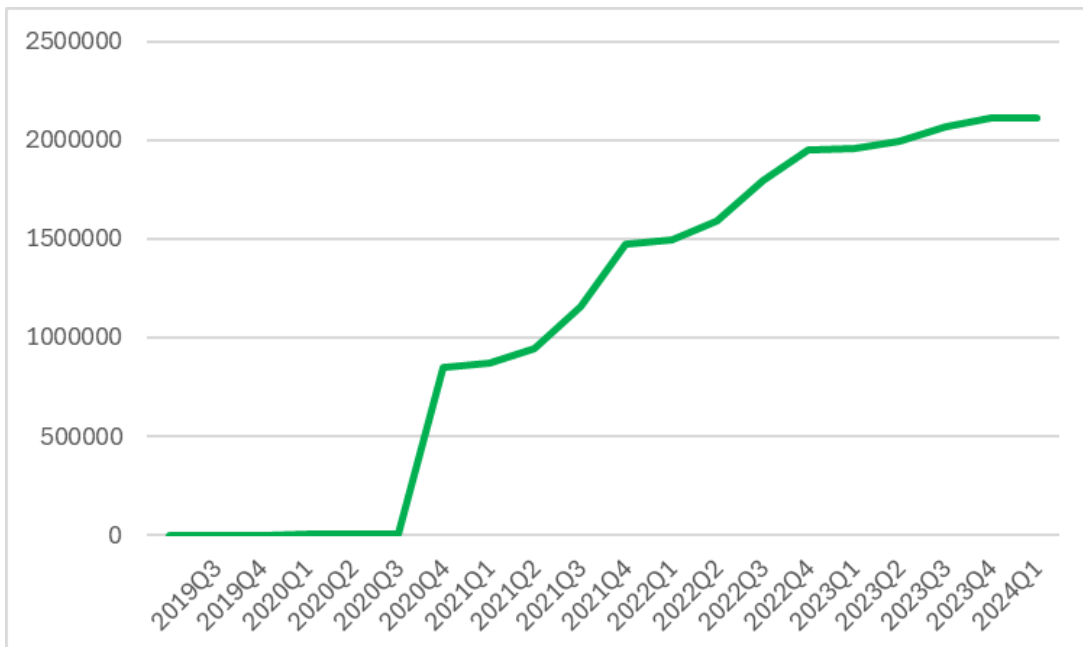
Figure 6: Total area treated for weeds



Total area treated for wildling conifers

Figure 7 shows that the total hectares treated for wildling conifers totalled over 2 million hectares and was constant throughout the J4N programme.

Figure 7: Total area treated for wildling conifers





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