MAHI | JOBS
MŌ TE TAIAO | FOR NATURE

Final Programme Review
Arotake Hōtaka Whakamutunga

JUNE 2020 – JUNE 2025
PIPIRI 2020 – PIPIRI 2025

Mihi

Tērā taku manu ka topa ngā parirau, whāriki te kōruru ki a Tāne-i-te-uru.

Ka rere ki runga, ka pao ki raro, whakairo tonu iho te ngaru kiri o Tangaroa.

Tai nui, tai roa, tai aroha ki taiao, koinei taku manu ka pae, ka tau, ka whakatārewahia kia hua mai rā ko te pitomata ki tua.

Mauri tū, mauri ora, mauri ki te taiao e!

Away, fleeting bird, cast your feathers wide, let your winged shadow cloak far over the forest.

Soar up, dive down, carve your etchings into the crested waves of the sea.

Great tides, long strides, swathes of care for nature, that's where you land for rest and respite, awaiting the next spark of potential to arise.

Alive, vibrant, health to the natural world!

Contents

Cover photo: Southern Lakes Sanctuary. Credit: DOC

Left: Kauri Protection and Restoration Project. Credit: DOC

A word from James Palmer, Ministry for the Environment Chief Executive

The Jobs for Nature programme was initiated during a period of uncertainty in Aotearoa New Zealand, creating jobs for people working in the forestry, tourism, and hospitality sectors, while strengthening our natural environment.

Over five years, more than 500 projects were funded across the country, creating over 15,000 employment opportunities and restoring our unique landscapes and ecosystems. Teams planted millions of native species and tackled wilding pines and wallabies. Some projects, like the Kaipara Moana Remediation, were unprecedented in scale, addressing complex, multi-catchment challenges.

These efforts have strengthened New Zealand's natural environment, and its resilience to climate change. For many Māori, the programme's impact runs deeper – restoring culturally significant sites such as wāhi tapu, enabling Māori-led solutions based on mātauranga, and reconnecting whānau with whenua through kaitiakitanga.

The programme has resulted in an estimated $3.15 return on investment for every $1 of central government spending. But the numbers only tell part of the story. Jobs for Nature offered meaningful work during a time of uncertainty, boosting people's wellbeing, building skills, and strengthening communities. This was especially clear after Cyclones Gabrielle and Hale, when established projects quickly adapted to meet local needs. Today, we have a larger, more capable environmental management workforce, ready to take on challenges at scale and at pace.

Government agencies have learnt a great deal through this journey. We have refined our systems and processes, particularly around funds management, data collection, and contracting. We've also gained a clearer view of the value, not just in environmental outcomes, but in the social, cultural, and economic benefits which ripple outward. Platforms like the Tūhono Taiao (Nature Connections) website are helping us build momentum, connecting community groups, improving access to funding, and offering a bird's-eye view of who's doing what and where.

Lastly, I am incredibly proud to oversee a programme which has touched the lives of so many throughout the country. Delivering something of this scale has taken immense effort, vision, and heart – from those behind the scenes to the thousands of passionate Kiwis doing the mahi or work on the ground. Jobs for Nature has been a win for our environment, our people, and our economy, and a powerful example of what's possible when we work together with purpose.

Executive summary

In 2020, the New Zealand Government identified an opportunity to address long-standing sustainability and environmental challenges while responding to the economic downturn forecast from COVID-19. This led to the Jobs for Nature programme, designed around three core objectives.

1. Create approximately 11,000 employment opportunities in regions most in need.
2. Deliver enduring benefits for healthy waterways, biodiversity, climate change, and cultural values.
3. Support sustainable land use and the implementation of regulatory requirements, including for freshwater, biodiversity, and climate change.

Jobs for Nature became one of the largest nationwide investments in people and the environment. From June 2020 to June 2025, the $1.185 billion programme was delivered across five agencies:

- Ministry for the Environment (MfE)
- Department of Conservation (DOC)
- Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI)
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE)
- Toitū Te Whenua | Land Information New Zealand (LINZ).

Key achievements

More than 15,900 people started work through the programme, contributing 13.2 million hours. Many gained skills and experience that strengthened the environmental workforce, particularly in regions and sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Environmental delivery was extensive. Projects restored freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems, improved fish passage, expanded pest and weed control, protected threatened species, strengthened biosecurity, and supported mātauranga Māori-led approaches. These activities have established positive environmental momentum.

Independent analysis estimates a return of $3.15 in benefits for every $1 invested, reflecting combined economic, environmental, and wellbeing gains. The total estimated benefits exceed $4.1 billion, based on conservative modelling assumptions, with an expected payback period of around six years.

How the programme operated

The programme was initially overseen by the Sustainable Land Use Ministerial Group, and later in the programme by a single Minister. Delivery led by individual agencies with a cross-agency Secretariat provided cohesion by coordinating reporting, evaluation, and programme-wide communications. The programme evolved as conditions changed, with early emphasis on rapid job creation shifting toward capability development and environmental outcomes as economic conditions changed.

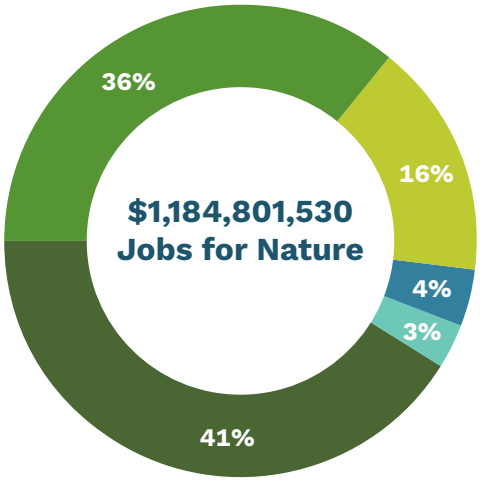
Agencies funded projects that aligned with the programme's objectives. Recipients included community groups, councils, iwi, hapū, charitable trusts, and private companies.

What was learned

Effective collaboration, strong relationships, and a clear shared purpose were central to delivery. Independent evaluation found the programme to be effective, relevant, and strongly additional, with benefits continuing to develop as completed work takes effect. The review also identified opportunities to strengthen future whole-of-government initiatives, particularly through clearer data systems and more consistent contracting approaches established early in programme design.

This five-year review, prepared by the Jobs for Nature Secretariat, reports on the changes realised or anticipated as a result of the programme – economic, environmental, social, and cultural – and captures lessons to support future large or cross-agency investments.

Figure 1: Programme funding distribution, by agency



- DOC – $485,278,000
- MFE – $430,576,143
- MPI – $188,015,606
- MBIE – $40,931,781
- LINZ – $40,000,000

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

2020-2025

Programme lifetime

13,275,891
hours worked

15,965
people employed

524
approved projects

348
completed projects

14,071,640
plants in the ground

704,938
hectares of land under plant pest control

2,112,524
hectares of wilding conifers controlled

2,577,564
hectares of land under animal pest control

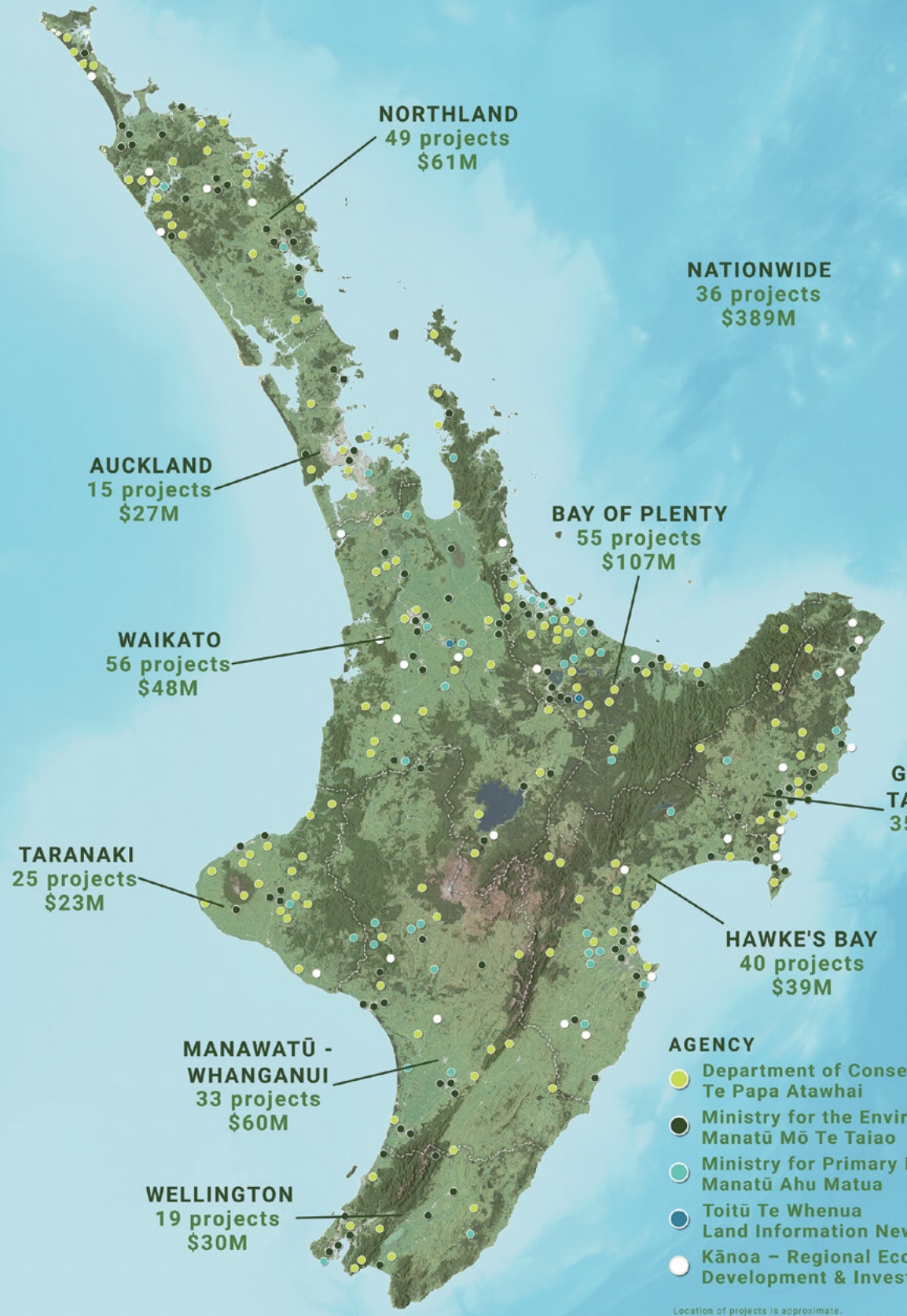
6,650
hectares of freshwater under restoration

7,472
hectares of land under restoration (excluding freshwater areas)

5,106
kilometres of fencing constructed

TE IKA-A-MĀUI
NORTH ISLAND

JOBS FOR NATURE | MAHI MŌ TE TAIAO



AGENCY

- Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai
- Ministry for the Environment Manatū Mō Te Taiao
- Ministry for Primary Industries Manatū Ahu Matua
- Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand
- Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Location of projects is approximate.
Projects with more than one location are not presented on the map.
Published in October 2025 by Toitū Te Whenua LINZ.
Includes data reported through J4N quarterly reporting to 30th June 2025.
Land Cover, Terrain and Imagery - Toitū Te Whenua LINZ
Bathymetry - GEBCO Compilation Group (2021) GEBCO 2021 Grid
Hillshade - Eagle Technology; Textures - South Arrow Maps

TE WAIPOUNAMU
SOUTH ISLAND

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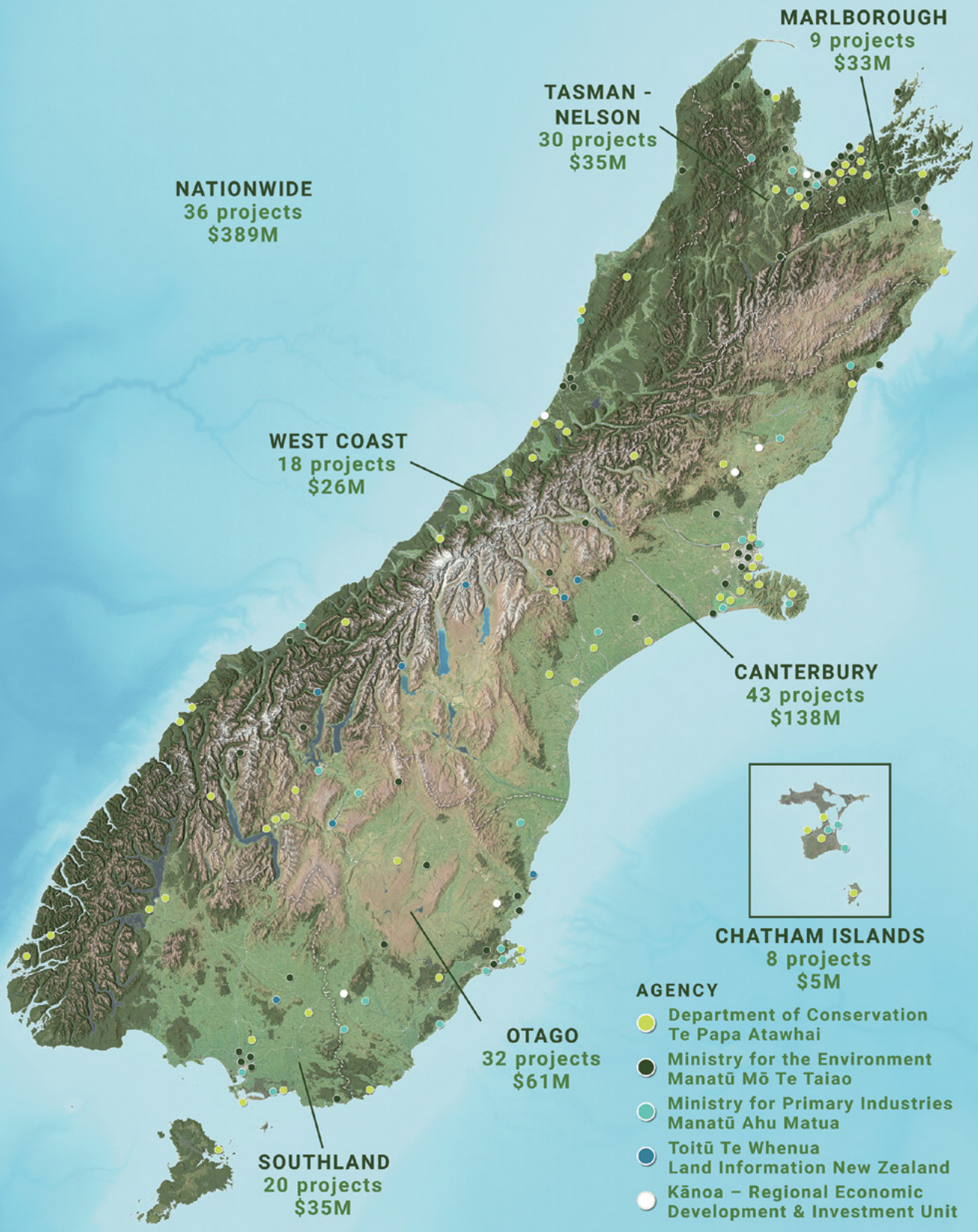

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Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

How the programme evolved

In early 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, the Government faced significant unemployment risks with the Treasury initially forecasting peaks of 13 to 26 per cent. At the same time, work was already underway to improve freshwater, biodiversity, and climate resilience. Budget 2020 brought these priorities together under the five year, cross-agency Jobs for Nature programme, with $1.245 billion (including existing initiatives like One Billion Trees) allocated to create jobs that delivered environmental benefits.

Programme direction and major funding decisions were overseen by Sustainable Land Use (SLU) Ministerial Group, with delivery led by individual agencies and their Ministers. For detailed agency funding allocations, see appendix A.

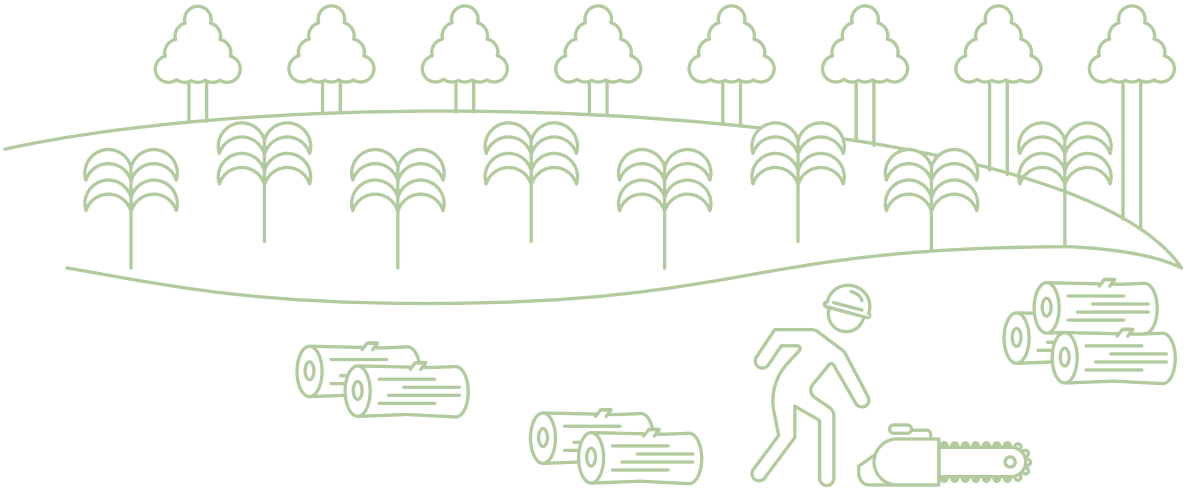
A Reference Group in Year One and an Advisory Group from Year Two provided external perspectives from local government, Māori, agriculture, and non-government organisations. A cross-agency Secretariat, hosted by MfE, supported programme cohesion by coordinating ministerial engagement, governance, reporting, evaluation, risk management, and communications, enabling the programme to operate as a unified system.

These arrangements remained largely consistent until oversight shifted to a single Minister (Associate Environment) following the 2023 General Election.

The programme adapted as conditions changed. In late 2020, SLU Ministers shifted the focus from short-term job creation to building a skilled environmental workforce as economic forecasts improved, while also placing a greater emphasis on environmental outcomes. External reviews supported this shift. Projects, meanwhile, worked through severe weather events, labour shortages, and pandemic restrictions. A Transition Strategy helped agencies and partners prepare for the programme's end and supported ongoing collaboration and learning, including through the launch of the Tūhono Taiao (Nature Connections) website.

Over its life, programme funding reduced to $1.185 billion. By June 2025, $1.164 billion had been contracted out. A total of 348 projects had been completed, with 175 projects still being managed by agencies.

For more detail on the programme's history and funding see appendix B.



Programme timeline

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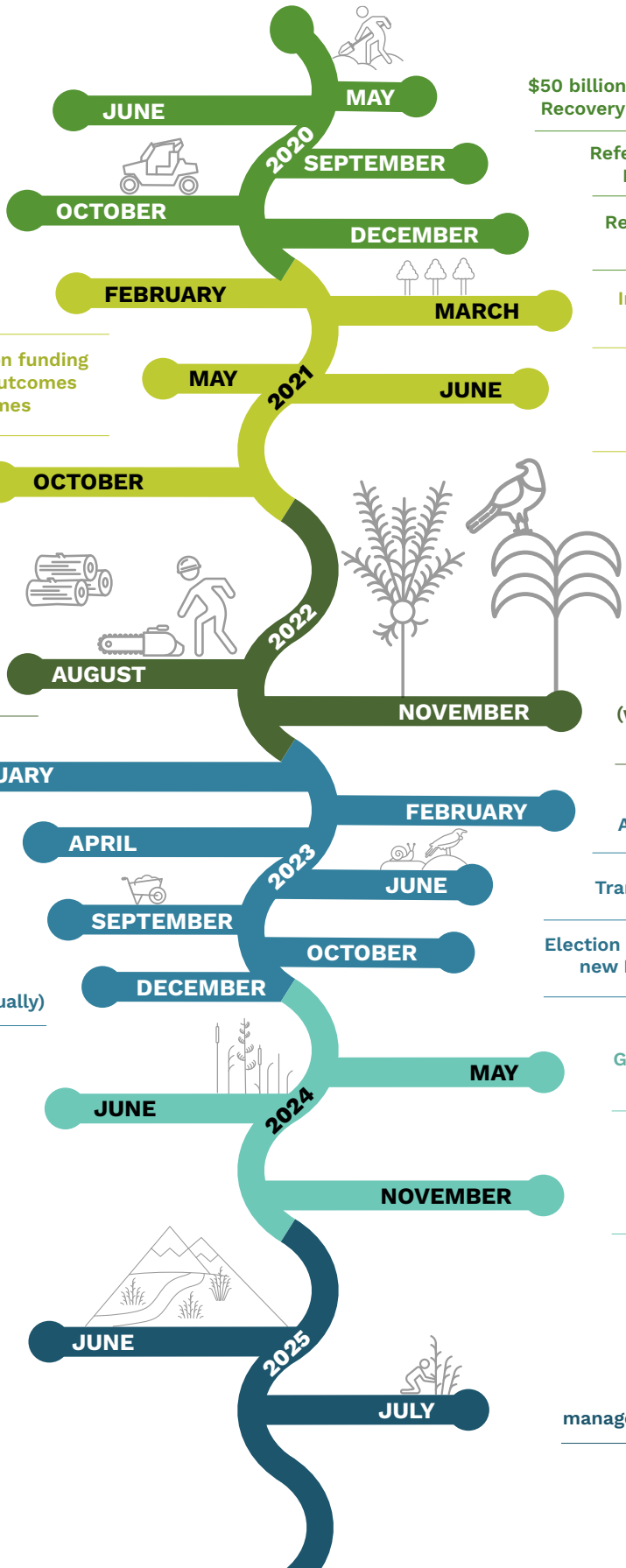


Jobs for Nature established via Cabinet paper Initial funding allocation decisions

Election – some changes to Ministers group

Website launched www.jobsfornature.govt.nz

Change in emphasis to focus on funding projects with environmental outcomes relative to employment outcomes

Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet Implementation Unit stocktake

Flooding in the Nelson/ Tasman/Marlborough region

Cyclone Hale

Cabinet paper progress update

Interim external evaluation (Allen + Clarke)

Economic impact report (Martin Jenkins) (updated annually)

Tūhono Taiao public release

Programme end date

Final external evaluation (Allen + Clarke)

$50 billion COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF) announced

Reference Group Investment Framework implemented

Reporting metrics finalised (including employment)

Internal programme audit (RDC Ltd)

$26.5m reprioritised for cameras on commercial fishing vessels

Interim benefits report (with regional and project profiles to follow)

Cyclone Gabrielle Advisory group concludes

Transition Strategy released

Election – Coalition Government/ new Ministerial arrangements

Government Budget notes programme wind down

Social impact report (ImpactLab)

175 projects continued, managed by individual agencies

Outcomes

This section examines whether Jobs for Nature achieved its goals and whether the nearly $1.2 billion of public investment delivered the expected value. It also explores the wider flow-on effects of the programme.

In 2022, the Secretariat collaborated with partner agencies to develop a benefits map (appendix C) outlining the economic, social, and environmental benefits the programme was expected to generate. Many environmental objectives are medium- to long-term, which limits what this report can definitively state as achieved at this stage (see appendix D for key reporting limitations). Evidence has been guided by the Jobs for Nature Investment Framework (appendix E) and by changes in strategic context. Reporting draws on a range of monitoring and evaluation sources across agencies. While the programme generated substantial evidence of impact, some data gaps remain due to legacy systems and the speed at which the programme was established. The programme was not resourced to measure every outcome, and in some cases, measurement would have been prohibitively costly.

An independent evaluation by Allen + Clarke assessed how effectively the programme was implemented and the extent to which outcomes were realised for participants and the environment.

This section summarises the observed and anticipated economic, social, cultural, and environmental changes after five years of investment. Annual achievements for 2024/25 are available in appendix F.

Credit: Sustainable Business Network, Partnering to Plant Project

Delivering for the economy

New Zealand's economy – especially export sectors, such as primary industries and tourism – relies heavily on the natural environment. There is growing recognition that environmental protection can also support economic performance by improving productivity and resilience. Nature-based work can be deployed quickly, providing near-immediate economic benefits to support household and business resilience.

Much of the programme's long-term economic potential relates to carbon sequestration and strengthening the resilience of the primary sector. Examples include:

- reducing stock losses linked to degraded waterways, drought, or disease
- supporting New Zealand's biosecurity reputation, which underpins international trade (export earnings from food and fibre were forecast to reach $57 billion by 30 June 2025)
- improving protection against climate-related natural disasters and pest or disease outbreaks.

Tourism also depends on the natural environment. Before COVID-19, tourism was New Zealand's largest export industry, generating $41 billion annually. Border closures had a severe impact – one-third of tourism jobs (72,000) and one-quarter of owner-operators were lost. Jobs for Nature aimed to support these hard-hit sectors by creating local employment and reducing flow-on impacts in communities reliant on tourism.

What is the difference for the economy?

Although the programme focused primarily on social (employment) and environmental benefits, economic gains were also anticipated.

After five years, a conservative independent economic analysis estimates that for every $1 invested, Jobs for Nature will generate $3.15 in economic, environmental, and wellbeing benefits over 30 years (totalling $4.132 billion at the time of this review). The investment's payback period, which means when the programme is expected to cover its costs, is estimated at six years.

This result was achieved despite significant challenges:

- **COVID-19 disruptions** which reduced productivity through illness, psychological impacts, and public health requirements.
- **Supply chain issues** including labour and material shortages, and travel restrictions, and other constraints that contributed to higher costs, and broader inflationary pressures.
- **Severe weather events** including Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle (early 2023) and major floods in Buller, Marlborough (July 2021), West Coast, Nelson/Tasman, and Marlborough (August 2022). Around 22 per cent of total programme investment was in the four regions most affected by Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle (Hawke's Bay, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, Bay of Plenty, and Northland).

Economic stimulation

The Jobs for Nature programme generated significant direct, indirect, and induced economic activity across the country. Key outcomes from the Government's $1.185 billion investment include:

- Nearly $1.7 billion in additional economic activity, supporting more than 10,300 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs nationwide.
- Impacts extended beyond direct employment, with ripple effects benefiting local businesses and communities through spending on supplies, services, and everyday essentials.
- The regions with the highest estimated direct economic benefits were:
  - Canterbury: $279 million in activity and 1,281 FTE jobs (strongest return per dollar invested)
  - Bay of Plenty: $193 million and 935 FTE jobs
  - Otago: $115 million and around 550 FTE jobs
  - Northland: over $100 million and more than 570 FTE jobs.

Projects also attracted $239 million in co-funding from local government, non-government organisations, and private partners (excluding in-kind contributions), equating to a leverage ratio of $0.26 for every $1 of Crown investment. This co-funding was not included in the return-on-investment analysis.

Although the programme's economic impact is positive, it formed part of the wider COVID-19 response. The broader fiscal effects of that response sit outside the scope of this programme-specific analysis.

Improved productivity and cost savings

Proactive environmental management is expected to generate substantial long-term savings and productivity gains, including:

- improved water quality from wetland restoration, reducing water-treatment costs (estimated at $3.2 billion)
- avoided irrigation and hydro losses ($523 million) and reduced fire risk ($170 million)
- biodiversity-related productivity gains ($457 million) from healthier, more resilient ecosystems
- improved agricultural productivity through reduced grazing competition ($246 million) and lower pest-control costs ($229 million).

These gains support healthier livestock, stronger ecosystems, and more resilient rural communities.

Better and more business

Jobs for Nature did more than create jobs – it strengthened the capability and resilience of the businesses delivering them. Many organisations developed new commercial skills through:

- mentoring in budgeting, pricing, quoting, inventory control, compliance, proposal development, business planning, and staff management
- establishing local nurseries and supply chains, reducing reliance on external suppliers and lowering costs.

These gains flowed into the wider economy. Several groups secured new commercial contracts beyond Jobs for Nature – including long-term maintenance contracts with energy companies and regional councils – based on their cost-effectiveness and local expertise.

In some regions, Jobs for Nature also supported industry transitions – for example, from forestry to carbon-credit schemes, honey production, and native planting, and from tourism to environmental restoration and education. These shifts improved resilience during periods of economic disruption.

Several projects demonstrated how environmental work can add commercial value to primary industries and tourism. These examples encouraged further investment in nature-based activities and strengthened business continuity in disrupted sectors.

Overall, the programme helped build stronger businesses, supported continuity, and enabled more sustainable commercial models to emerge.

Contribution to sustainable tourism

DOC's Jobs for Nature Conservation and Tourism Support initiative in South Westland had a high economic impact, providing critical support to participants, local tourism businesses, and the wider community during the early years of the programme. A 2022 survey found that 8 per cent of programme participants were involved in tourism. Evidence five years on suggests that this support contributed to sector resilience, particularly in areas heavily reliant on nature-based tourism.

CASE STUDY

Sustainable tourism

Credit: Tahu Taylor-Koolen

Waitomo Caves are among New Zealand's most sought after and iconic natural attractions, with deep connections to the local hapū. The closure of international borders created employment concerns for Discover Waitomo, with 80 per cent of its 500,000 annual visitors coming from overseas. After half its workforce was laid off, Tourism Holdings Limited (the parent company) saw the potential of Jobs for Nature funding. It would provide not only employment security for some of its remaining team, but also an opportunity to give back to the environment and whenua the business is built on.

Funded through DOC, Discover Waitomo was the first organisation in the country to set up a Kaimahi for Nature project. Through the project, staff undertook their usual primary tourism work and then, to top up their hours, worked in conservation. With the original $500,000 of funding, the project restored significant environmental sites in the area, employing 18 staff (the goal had been 10). As a result, Discover Waitomo was able to retain crew with a broad range of skills, knowledge, and experience (eg, management, guides, food and beverage), creating a solid foundation for the business.

This was critical for when borders re-opened in July 2022. When demand came, it came quickly. Other tourism businesses struggled to get staff, because employment in the sector was no longer seen as secure or appealing. But Discover Waitomo was able to scale up relatively quickly – despite some challenges, it did not have to start from scratch.

Quick operationalisation had regional and national significance, providing momentum for the sector and local communities. Without programme funding, the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic would have been felt for longer and business recovery would have been slower.

In 2025, two years after project funding ended, about 60 per cent of the Jobs for Nature crew still work within Discover Waitomo – often in senior roles. This retention indicates medium-term sustainable employment success. Other enduring outcomes of participating in the programme include improved culture and employee connectedness, as well as greater environmental advocacy (eg, visitors may sponsor trees, while they also learn of the impact of trees on the caves and how impact is managed).

Since the programme, Discover Waitomo has maintained a commitment to escalating its pre-existing environmental efforts, reporting it constantly seeks opportunities for a rebirth of Jobs for Nature.

Tirohanga Māori (perspective)

Procuring services from Māori-owned organisations supports intergenerational wellbeing, local relationships, self-determination, and economic outcomes. Many Jobs for Nature projects were notable for their integration of Māori values, such as kaitiakitanga (stewardship), utu (reciprocity), manaakitanga (kindness), whanaungatanga (ethnic belonging), tikanga (customs), and mātauranga (knowledge).

Although all agencies aimed to support Māori communities, Kānoa (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit) applied a social procurement approach to do so more directly. By 30 June 2022, compared with other agencies, Kānoa had allocated a higher share of its Jobs for Nature funding to Māori recipients (85 per cent) and to Māori-led projects (74 per cent) than other agencies. Contracts included outcomes related to supplier diversity and support for local businesses (often linked to diversity). Project closure reports show most Kānoa-funded projects prioritised or allowed Māori and Pasifika businesses to quote for work. In several cases, multiple subcontracts went to these businesses.

Most of the measurable returns from Kānoa-funded projects (88 per cent) were environmental – reflecting strong alignment with te ao Māori values. Returns varied across regions but were notably high in Northland, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, and Taranaki.

An independent case study of 20 projects found that some enabled diversification into more climate-resilient Māori economic activity. For some communities, funding was described as transformational; for others, it did not go far enough – consistent with wider oversubscription for DOC and MfE contestable funds, where demand exceeded available funding by a factor of 10.

Delivering for people

COVID-19 created some of the most challenging social and economic conditions in recent decades. Jobs for Nature was established at a time when wellbeing was expected to decline, and unemployment to rise. Outdoor, nature-based work was less affected by public health restrictions than many indoor industries, providing a more stable source of employment for many people.

A core objective was to create more than 11,000 employment opportunities in regions most in need. These roles were intended to support immediate employment and provide broader benefits for participants and their communities.

- **Skill development.** Well-designed programmes offered diverse opportunities across skill levels, improving long-term employment prospects and earning potential.
- **Improved wellbeing.** Nature-based work supported mental health and could act as a protective factor during periods of stress or isolation, with positive flow-on effects for whānau.

Non-economic community benefits were also possible.

- **Identity.** The natural environment shapes identity and values, particularly for Māori, where connections to whenua and whakapapa are central.
- **Recreational value.** Time in nature improves mental and physical wellbeing, boosts productivity, and often involves shared experiences that strengthen social bonds – especially valuable during the pandemic.
- **Community cohesion.** Inclusive participation, shared goals, and collective action can strengthen communities and support resilience during difficult times.

These benefits for people also ripple outward, positively influencing the economy and the environment.

What is the difference for the workforce?

Contribution to employment

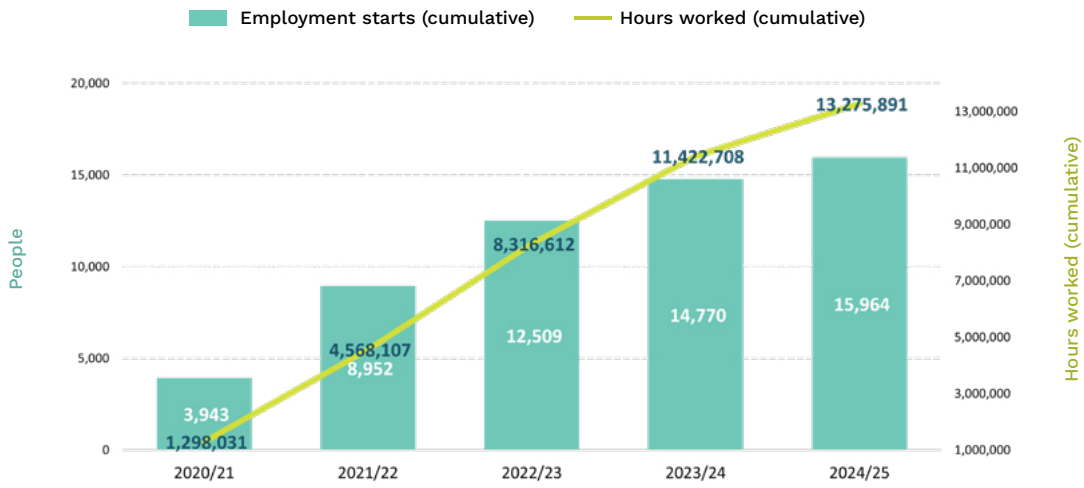
The independent evaluation found the programme highly effective at creating employment opportunities during the pandemic and early recovery. Over five years:

- 15,964 people started employment through Jobs for Nature
- 25 per cent of these starts were in Year One, and 56 per cent by the end of Year Two
- participants collectively worked 13.2 million hours by June 2025.

Some pre-existing projects may have created roles regardless, but the independent evaluation concluded that many roles would not have existed without programme funding, particularly given tight labour market conditions and the effect of the Wage Subsidy, which preserved an estimated 175,000 jobs.

Long-term employment was not a programme objective, but some participants successfully transitioned into permanent roles or ongoing contract work across multiple sectors. At the end of the programme, 602 people remained employed, most in ongoing roles.

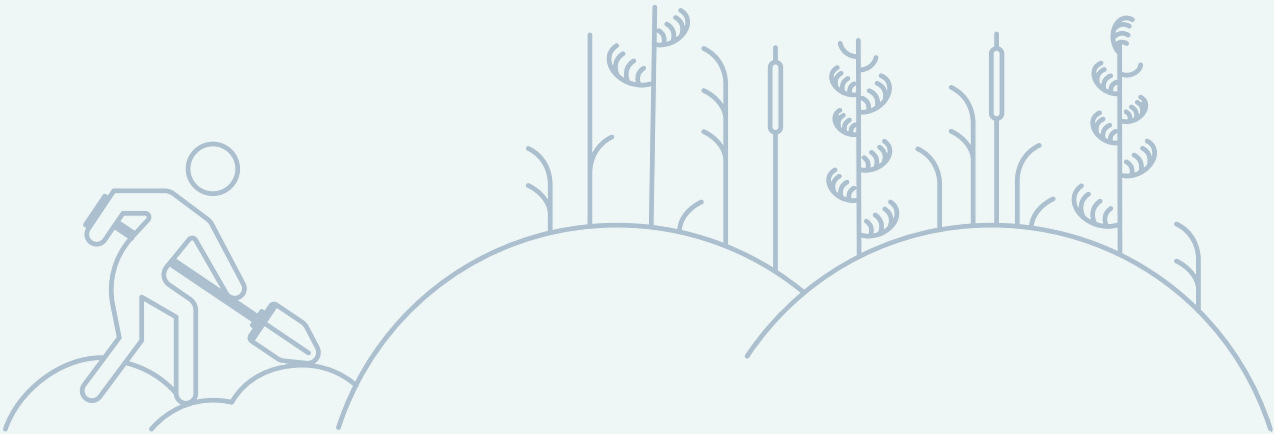
Figure 2: Annual employment starts and hours worked



Roles fell broadly into three categories:

1. **conservation and environmental management** – pest control managers, native forestry and restoration planting teams, catchment coordinators, kaitiaki/ rangers, wilding conifer control teams, aquatic weed control, nursery staff, and biodiversity monitoring
2. **project management and support** – project planning, execution and administration
3. **specialised** – geographical information system specialists, national predator control advisors, environmental educators, and te ao Māori experts.

These roles were critical for delivering project outputs and contributing to broader efforts to address New Zealand's environment challenges.



Who benefited from employment?

Programme-wide demographic data was not collected. However, analysis of 114 project closure reports showed:

- 52 per cent of workers were aged 25–49
- 22 per cent were 18–24
- around one-third were Māori
- 40 per cent were women, lower than the national workforce.

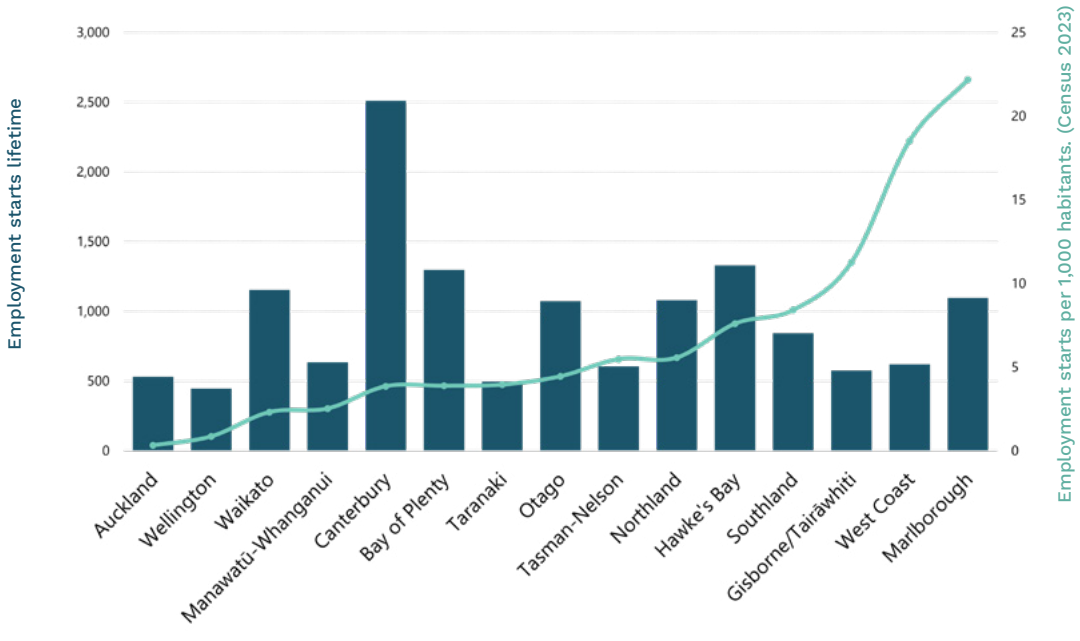
These results suggest the programme reached groups that often face barriers to employment. Younger workers and Māori were represented at higher proportions than in the wider labour market, indicating the programme may have helped address existing disparities.

A small social impact study also found unspecified barriers limited women's participation in some projects, despite efforts by some providers to increase uptake.

Participants frequently came from disrupted sectors such as tourism and construction, and for some, Jobs for Nature provided their first-ever job.

Employment starts were highest in Canterbury, Hawke's Bay, and Bay of Plenty, with the strongest per-capita gains in Marlborough, West Coast, and Gisborne/Tairāwhiti.

Figure 3: Comparison of regional employment starts to population



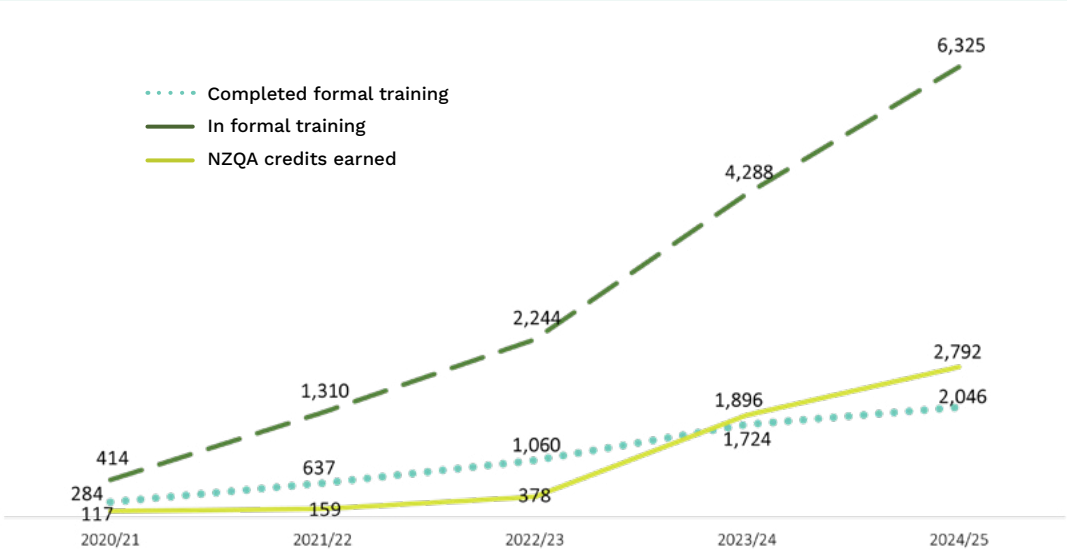
These gains were particularly meaningful because:

- Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, Hawke's Bay, Waikato, and Bay of Plenty had some of the highest under-utilisation rates
- high unemployment spillover had been forecast in Waikato, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, and Bay of Plenty.

Contribution to a more skilled environmental workforce

Capability development was a major feature of the programme. Around 70 per cent of projects reported a focus on building workforce skills. More than 6,000 employees received formal training, with most of this occurring from Year Two onward as the programme shifted from immediate job creation to capability building.

Figure 4: Cumulative number of employees in formal training, completions, and NZQA credits (2020–25)



Several factors helped build a skilled environmental workforce.

- **Purpose.** A clearer strategic focus strengthened capability in priority areas, such as freshwater management.
- **Progression.** Capability plans and apprenticeships supported skill growth, and role duration provided practical on-the-job experience.
- **Scale.** The Kaipara Moana Remediation initiative supported nearly 60 field advisors to gain freshwater farm planning qualifications, resulting in a network of skilled rural professionals.
- **Expansion.** A 2022 employee survey found 74 per cent of Jobs for Nature participants had not previously worked in conservation or environmental roles.
- **Leverage.** Community events helped share practical environmental knowledge more widely and encouraged early interest among children and families.

Training (both formal and informal) covered a range of skills including:

Environmental skills	General/transferable skills
• Biodiversity, ecology, conservation science, ecosystem health, freshwater ecology, plant-biotic interactions, molecular ecology, native forestry • Plant identification, ecosystem management • Marine, terrestrial, and conservation operations • Data, mapping, and monitoring skills • Pest control techniques • Environmental mātauranga	• Health and safety, first aid • Tool use (eg, chainsaws and guns) • Driving and vehicle use (eg, tractors, quads, helicopters) • Project management • Business and administrative skills (eg, communications, finance, governance) • Cultural knowledge (eg, te reo Māori, tikanga)

Insufficient investment in capability is often identified as a barrier to achieving environmental and climate resilience. In contrast, the depth and breadth of Jobs for Nature training has helped build a workforce better equipped to deliver environmental work, supporting the intent of Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. The programme has laid important foundations, with some participants moving into ongoing roles that will continue to contribute to environmental outcomes.

The value of this capability was evident after severe weather events such as Cyclone Gabrielle, when trained workers assisted with emergency response tasks such as tree clearing and debris management. As severe weather events become more frequent, these skills will remain critical, strengthening community resilience.

Who benefited from training?

Programme-level demographic reporting is not available. However, based on workforce representation and project-level data, younger workers (18–24 years) and Māori are likely to have benefited most from training – including some who may not have entered environmental work without programme funding.

Regions with the most substantial training activity included Bay of Plenty, Gisborne/Tairāwhiti, West Coast, and Northland, consistent with findings from the independent evaluation suggesting these areas achieved the greatest gains in workforce capability for the future.

Who benefited from improved wellbeing?

Participants who had been previously unemployed showed the greatest lifetime social value. The pandemic caused significant anxiety and distress for many New Zealanders – particularly those aged 15–44. With little evidence of poor wellbeing outcomes among Jobs for Nature participants (most of whom appear to be in this age group), involvement may have helped buffer some negative impacts.

Te Rūnanga o Hokonui has been working to restore plant and animal life across Southland's Hokonui Hills. Credit: LINZ

Individual and collective wellbeing

What is the difference for participants?

Programme-level social-impact measurement was limited. However, thematic case studies found positive outcomes, and a small social impact study (across four diverse projects) calculated an average lifetime social value per person of nearly $15,000.

Environment

Physical connection

"The air smells fresher... We are hearing more kererū at Kitchener Park."
Project personnel – Year One evaluation

"I had a lot of theoretical skills but I had no bush skills when I started this, and now I feel comfortable there (in the bush)."
Project personnel – Te ao Māori evaluation

Emotional connection

A 2022 survey found 86 per cent of employees stated they felt more connected to nature.

"People need to reconnect to nature, so that they care about what happens to our planet. They need to understand there is something they can do about it."
Project personnel – Year one evaluation

"It's the perfect way to combine the healing aspects of working in nature for our kids and our people who are coming out of prison."
Project personnel – Project profile

Generational connection

"I like to think the tracks I am cutting will be used by my children's children. It's like that when we do our work. I love the tracks we cut, they are beautiful."
Project personnel – Thematic case study

"I brought my mum and aunties back to the marae because of the programme. They hadn't been in contact with this side of their iwi whakapapa."
Project personnel – Te ao Māori evaluation

Health

Physical health

"It has been good for my cardiovascular health, really good for my body."
Project personnel – Year two evaluation

"The physicality of some of the work increased some participants' fitness..."
Project personnel – Year two evaluation

Mental health

"Conversations with participants so far have shown positive mental health and wellbeing benefits for those working in nature-based employment and training."
Mid-term benefits report

"The benefits of this project will long be seen in the smiles and successes of the men who were able to stand up when given the right opportunity."
Project closure report (unpublished)

The report covered:

- **employment** (improved future employability, reduced reliance on government support)
- **training** (increased specialised skills and driver licensing)
- **social good** (improved mental health and reduced addiction, offending, and risky behaviour linked to employment).

Participants frequently described the work as meaningful and engaging, delivering benefits beyond employment.

Housing

Rent/mortgage affordability

"Kaimahi have moved into stable housing, enrolled their tamariki in schools with confidence, and strengthened family ties through their steady employment."

Project closure report (unpublished)

Subjective wellbeing

Sense of purpose

"Many of our young kaimahi had never had a job before. They now show up early, stay focused, and take pride in their role as kaitiaki."

Project closure report (unpublished)

"This work helps me to define who I am."

Project personnel – Year two evaluation

Family and friends

Family stability

"... ameliorated to a large extent potential for disruption and disfunction in the home setting..."

Project closure report (unpublished)

Connection

"Participants explained that connecting with members of their community was beneficial for their wellbeing, especially after the isolation of lockdown periods."

Project personnel - MBIE, South Westland outcomes assessment

"A lot of our youth need work. Need to connect."

Project personnel - Year two evaluation

Cultural capability and belonging

Whakawhanaungatanga (establishing family relationships)

"Unforeseen benefits have included strengthening the connection of rangatahi and pakeke with their whakapapa and iwi, learning about their history including sites of significance, reconnecting with old practices such as hunting and fishing ..."

Project personnel – Year one evaluation

Indigenous knowledge

In a 2022 employer survey, 16% indicated their project had a Mātauranga Māori focus.

Mid-term benefits report

"Kaumātua knowledge and shared stories were deeply appreciated by J4N kaimahi and seen as an important part of understanding the natural world as it once was."

Te ao Māori evaluation

What is the difference for communities?

Communities benefited in multiple ways. Some benefits – such as cultural and recreational improvements – were intended. Others, including stronger social cohesion, emerged as positive spillovers.

Projects were delivered nationwide. Gisborne/Tairāwhiti and the West Coast had the highest number of projects relative to population, followed by Tasman–Nelson. On a per-capita basis, the Chatham Islands saw the greatest benefit, with eight approved projects.

In a 2022 survey, 71 per cent of employers believed their project had a positive community impact; the remainder felt it was too early to assess.

Contribution to preservation of culture and heritage

Around 12 per cent of projects reported contributing to cultural or historical restoration, often as a secondary outcome. DOC – the primary funder of these initiatives – reported that 427 cultural sites were maintained or improved. The following case study illustrates the range of impacts achieved.

Ōpihi rock art gully, planting.

Credit: Te Ana Ngāi Tahu Māori Rock Art Trust

CASE STUDY

Cultural preservation

Described at times as New Zealand's original art galleries, ancient Māori rock art, known as tuhituhi o neharā, are culturally significant to mana whenua (iwi or hapū with customary authority), Māori, and New Zealand more generally. The tuhituhi o neharā – present in more than 700 limestone caves across Te Waipounamu (South Island) sites – were painted between 500 and 1,000 years ago. These artworks have attracted global interest and, if lost, they cannot be replaced.

Before Jobs for Nature, in 2017, the Ngāi Tahu Māori Rock Art Trust (the Trust) began a 10-year project, driven by mana whenua, to restore the ecology and biocultural values of the ecosystems surrounding nationally significant tuhituhi o neharā. Recognising these biocultural values, the Trust is trying to replicate the ecological diversity from the period when the rock art was created. Mahika kai (resource gathering) was practised at these sites. The planting and the artwork itself (depicting nature, including extinct birds like moa and pouākai) provide a glimpse into what Māori would have seen and smelled before European arrival.

The most precious of the rock sites, particularly for Ngāi Tahu whānui (population), are the Ōpihi sites. It is thought they depict the Māori pūrākau (creation story) of Papatūānuku (mother nature).

In 2021, the Trust successfully applied for $314,000 of DOC Jobs for Nature funding. Among other things, the funding was for the Trust to support and enable the kaitiaki (stewardship) role of its papatipu (customary) marae, and to raise awareness and appreciation of mana whenua history and culture. The work had a range of other co-funders (co-funds totalled $184,000):

- the Trust itself
- Meridian Energy Limited
- the Heritage Preservation Incentive Fund
- the Environment Canterbury Immediate Steps Fund.

In 2024, three years after project initiation, the Trust reported the Jobs for Nature funding had either directly or indirectly contributed to (among other things):

- extending its capability in the restoration of biocultural values, providing a best practice example of protection on farmland
- restoring the biocultural values at the 13 hectare site – nearly 41,000 native plants were planted (exceeding targets), quadrupling planting (from 11,000 before programme funding)
- developing the site as a focal point for locals (eg, 2,500 school children learning things like the importance of the awa (river) to Māori) and an attraction for visitors (eg, from cruise ships) – providing the opportunity for them to learn about the early cultural and natural history of New Zealand, with the tourism business enabling employment of two educators
- inspiring restoration of other rock sites, such as at Moa Valley at Craigmore Station
- strengthening cultural identity and mana whenua connection and role as kaitiaki to this wāhi tūpuna (sacred) site.

The Trust reported site visits, tikanga, and storytelling allowed more Ngāi Tahu to be aware of and connected to the sacred site and their ancestors. The site also adds value to the local runaka (tribal councils), with the ability to, for example, collect harakeke (a variety of flax which is a symbol of whānau and protection of life) for marae-based events.

The funding enabled the work of the Trust to be completed in half the anticipated time (three years). This accelerated many flow-on effects – for example, in 2025 the site secured a QEII fully protected open space covenant (it had previously achieved only the intermediary step of a restoration agreement), safeguarding its future forever.

Due to high levels of community interest, a key anticipated enduring outcome is future support for the protection and restoration of ecological and biocultural values (rock art, archaeology, mahika kai) at other sites throughout the Aoraki region.

Contribution to enhanced recreation

Around one in five projects (18 per cent) supported recreational enhancement, mainly through the construction and maintenance of tracks and huts. These activities delivered both environmental and recreational benefits. By the end of the programme, more than 3,200 kilometres of track had been maintained or created, and more than 900 huts had been maintained. The following case study illustrates the gains achieved.

Te Puna Blue Lakes planting.

Credit: Raukawa Charitable Trust

CASE STUDY

Enhanced Recreation

Te Puna / the Blue Spring, part of Te Waihou Awa and a taonga (treasure) for Raukawa, is widely known for its clear blue waters. Between 2014 and 2016, online exposure drove visitation from around 10,000 annually to similar numbers each peak month. This surge led to environmental damage – swimmers affected water clarity and purity, and riverbank erosion reduced native fish habitats. Infrastructure such as toilets and parking was also strained.

In response, the Raukawa Charitable Trust (RCT) partnered with South Waikato District Council (SWDC) in 2016 to restore the mana of the awa and manage visitor pressure. From 2021, DOC Jobs for Nature funding supported a biodiversity management plan shaped by:

- local aspirations (eg, through wānanga (tribal discussions))
- local seed sourcing
- ecological assessment (eg, identification of native ecosystems for restoration)
- whakaaro Māori (Māori thinking)
- grounded learning.

The community and land owners collaborated with the RCT and SWDC in planting 30,000 heritage rākau (trees) and undertaking pest control. Anglers were encouraged to remove invasive trout threatening native galaxias. These efforts, along with a temporary walkway closure due to rockfall, have supported the return of manu (birds) such as pīwakawaka and pūkeko. Visitors have expressed appreciation for the sights, sounds, and visible kaitiakitanga.

Visitor experience has also improved because of upgraded safety barriers, viewing platforms, and boardwalks along the 4.7 kilometre walkway. A sense of safety is critical for visitors, and this is reinforced through the presence of two kaitiaki. New signage provides the mana whenua perspective of the cultural and ecological significance of Te Puna and Te Waihou, deepening understanding of Raukawa identity.

SWDC and RCT also collaborated with other stakeholders on a complementary project to enhance parking facilities, helping manage demand and reduce local congestion.

Annual visitation has grown from 30,000 before the restoration, to around 45,000 to 50,000, engaging in activities including walking, photography, and bird watching. Anecdotally, the enhancement has also supported small-scale tourism in nearby communities.

Although programme funding ended in June 2025, the transformation has been described as ‘chalk and cheese’, and mātauranga a Raukawa was upheld throughout the project.

Te Puna Blue Lakes platform construction.

Te Puna Blue Lakes platform in use.

Credit: Raukawa Charitable Trust

Increased social connection

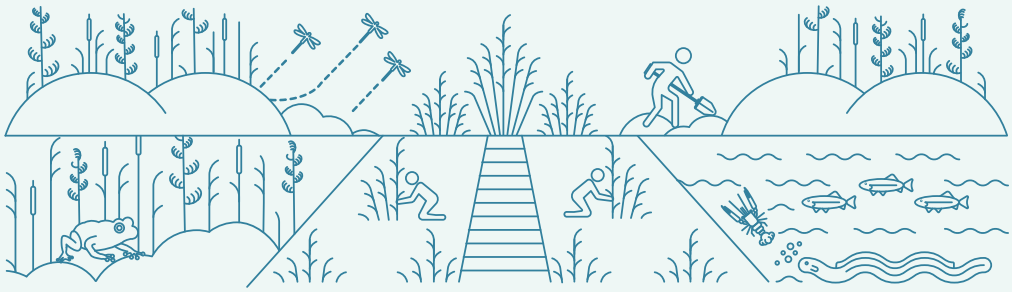
Community connection and collective effort were evident throughout the programme. In addition to strengthening personal relationships, two themes stood out.

Greater community awareness and involvement in environmental restoration

- Educational initiatives and hands-on volunteering increased environmental awareness, attitudes, and behaviours within communities.
- A stronger appreciation for local environments encouraged action driven by community interest rather than regulatory requirements.
- These emerging norms are likely to support long-term environmental benefits beyond the programme's direct work.

Strengthened collaboration among diverse groups: community, commercial, and institutional

- Collaboration was often driven by shared goals and recognition of the benefits of working together. Many projects involved multiple parties – community groups, iwi, businesses, and agencies – building on existing relationships and forming new ones.
- Improved collaboration led to better knowledge sharing and, in some cases, resource sharing. Some projects adopted broader indigenous approaches supporting landscape-scale restoration and longer-term gains.
- Several collaborations have continued beyond the programme, creating foundations for future governance, funding pathways, and environmental leadership. Even where formal partnerships ended, strong networks and trust often remained, supporting future collective action and proving valuable in emergencies.



Tirohanga Māori (perspective)

Jobs for Nature enhanced Māori wellbeing across Te Whare Tapa Whā – a holistic framework covering spiritual, physical, family, and mental health. This was achieved through mana-enhancing environmental work, steady income, and opportunities for learning.

Māori participants in case studies described connecting with the whenua, healing, and reconnecting with their whakapapa (lineage). The Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned noted, in the Phase One report, cultural strengths served as protective factors during the pandemic.

A notable feature of many Māori-led projects was the integration of mātauranga Māori, knowledge rooted in Māori identity, encompassing the past, present, and future. Cultural practices adopted included:

- te maramataka (Māori lunar calendar)
- kōrero tuku iho (oral traditions and stories of the past)
- mahinga / mahika kai (food cultivation and gathering)
- rongoā (traditional natural remedies) – supported in some instances by cultural health monitoring.

Māori rangatahi (youth) appear to have gained value from this integration of mātauranga Māori – in many projects, iwi and hapū mentors provided te ao Māori guidance, fostering deep learning and connection.

Delivering for the environment

New Zealand's environment underpins its national prosperity and the wellbeing of its people. For Māori, relationships with the whenua are profound and enduring, anchored in whakapapa and nurtured across generations. Connections are expressed through kaitiakitanga – a deeply rooted ethic of care and responsibility reflecting both ancestral obligations and contemporary stewardship.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the environment faced mounting challenges. Land-use change, invasive species, and growing climate impacts were contributing to soil degradation, water pollution, and biodiversity and ecosystem loss.

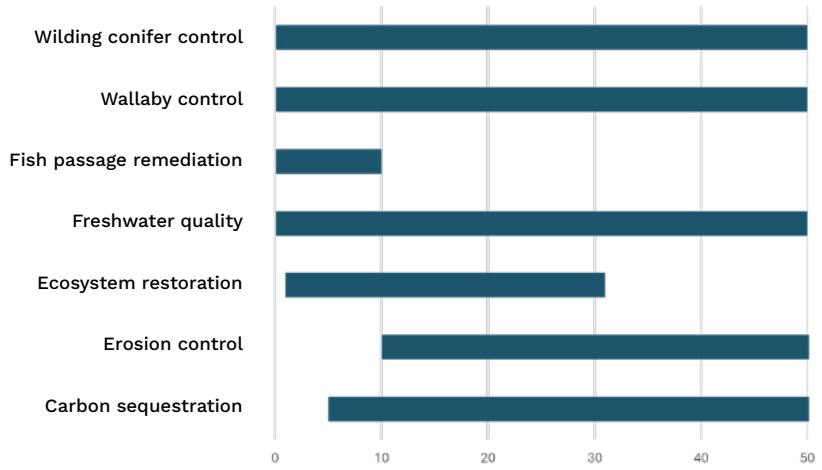
- An estimated 5,000 hectares of inland wetland have been lost since 2001, with only around 10 per cent remaining.
- 46 per cent of lakes larger than 1 hectare (more than 3,000 were assessed) were in poor or very poor ecological health.
- 76 per cent of freshwater fish were classified as either 'threatened' or 'at risk'.
- Between 2013 to 2018, 1,882 hectares of tall natural forest and 2,306 hectares of regenerating natural forest was converted to non-forest land use.
- 42 per cent of New Zealand's 168 native bird species faced a high risk of extinction.
- Approximately 630,000 hectares (2 per cent of land area) were infested with wallabies. Without control, it is estimated one-third of the country could be affected by 2072.

Delivering enduring environmental benefits was a core programme objective. Funding was directed toward activities known to generate both direct and wider ecosystem gains, including:

- **Water quality and aquatic ecosystems.** Riparian planting helps stabilise streambanks, reduce erosion, and filter pollutants before they reach waterways. Healthier, more natural waterways support better fish migration, stronger freshwater habitats, and reduced flooding risk.
- **Terrestrial biodiversity and ecosystems.** Controlling invasive plants (such as wilding conifers) improves light and space for native species to regenerate. Animal pest control reduces competition for food and water, improving survival rates for vulnerable native species and strengthening ecosystem processes.
- **Biosecurity.** Targeted pest management – including wallaby and wilding conifer control – protects productive farmland and commercial forestry, safeguards native ecosystems, and reduces the risk of reinfestation. Coordinated, landscape-level action avoids future costs and strengthens long-term biosecurity resilience.

Investment in catchment- and landscape-scale approaches was encouraged. While many benefits will only be fully realised 5–10 years after the programme's completion, the work undertaken has laid essential foundations for long-term ecosystem recovery.

Figure 5: How long it takes to see full environmental benefits (years)



Another core objective of the programme was to support sustainable land use and help implement key environmental regulations, including the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management (NPS-FM), Te Mana o te Taiao, and the National Pest Plant Accord. The investment was also designed to support New Zealand's transition to a low-carbon, resilient economy by backing nature-based solutions that protect ecosystems and reduce emissions.

What is the difference for the environment?

Healthier freshwater ecosystems

At least $495 million (41 per cent of total investment) went into improving aquatic life and restoring freshwater ecosystems. Funding supported NPS-FM implementation through planning, monitoring, and capability building, including work under Essential Freshwater, Te Mana o Te Wai, and At-risk Catchments.

Other projects developed plans and implemented monitoring systems. For example, the Te Hoiere Project used funding for a geospatial tool to assess erosion vulnerability, catchment condition surveys, and modelling with the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (now Earth Sciences New Zealand) to inform fish remediation priorities.

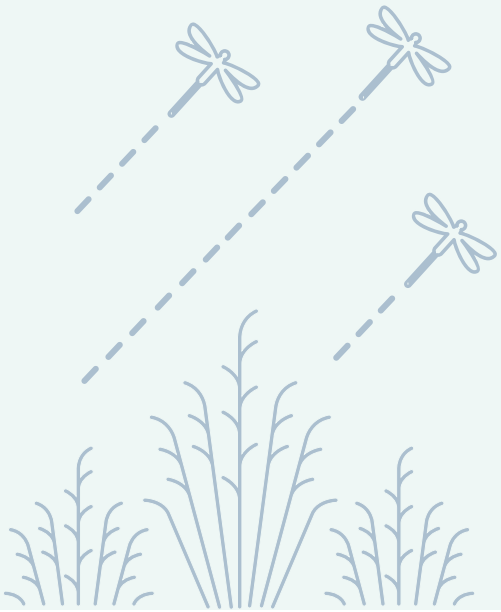
Other funds, like Ngā Awa Freshwater Improvement Programme, concentrated on on-the-ground delivery. This included fencing and restoration activities aimed at enhancing the biodiversity of 14 rivers, from mountains to the seas, spanning 7 regions and multiple land owners.

More than 44 per cent of projects reported supporting freshwater restoration with a range of contracted freshwater activities which enabled positive change. In total, freshwater restoration activities covered more than 6,500 hectares. Key achievements included planting more than 10.5 million freshwater plants, constructing more than 5,000 kilometres of fencing, and remediating more than 1,300 fish passages.

Table 1: Annual freshwater achievements

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Lifetime
Area of freshwater restoration (hectares)	341	1,950	2,020	1,768	571	6,650
Area under farm environment plans (hectares)	7,139	47,158	66,804	31,506	16,469	169,076
Fencing constructed (kilometres)	429	1,935	1,202	970	571	5,106
Farm environment plans completed	81	271	369	262	203	1,186
Fish passages remediated	5	188	426	470	228	1,317
Freshwater plants planted	398,764	2,412,405	2,778,711	3,072,851	2,041,423	10,704,155

Although positive progress towards environmental outcomes was observed, an independent freshwater case study found some Jobs for Nature projects were being undermined by broader external issues with wastewater and stormwater management. These included ageing infrastructure and ongoing discharging of raw sewage during heavy rainfall.



CASE STUDY

Freshwater

Īnanga, the smallest of New Zealand's whitebait species, is a population at risk and in decline due to changing land use. With around 97 per cent of Te Tai Tokerau Northland's original wetlands lost over the years, their spawning habitat has all but disappeared. In 2011, just one recorded spawning site remained in the region.

The Northland Īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project (NISHRP) aimed to scale up collaborative efforts in locating, protecting, and enhancing īnanga spawning habitats throughout the region. The project, funded by MfE, focused on community engagement, capacity building, and data mapping to prioritise restoration efforts – to improve water quality in the short term and contribute to climate resilience in the longer term.

At the core of the NISHRP are strong relationships; these have helped grow collective knowledge of īnanga ecology and the risks the species faces. NISHRP delivered its programme to 17 schools, reaching 500 students and more than 200 teachers and parents. The project's community events also reached farmers, lifestyle block owners, and other community members. Strong relationships with hapū partners remain.

Riparian planting.

Credit: Northland Īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project

Īnanga eggs.

Credit: Northland Īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project

Efforts have been significant, with 194 saltwater wedge, water quality, and spawning surveys completed, greatly expanding understanding of īnanga habitats across Northland. Other restoration efforts have generated increased protection.

- Four kilometres of fencing is safeguarding waterways.
- More than 20,096 native plants are stabilising banks.
- Pest control has removed hundreds of rats and mice, creating safer conditions for īnanga to thrive.

Northland now has more than 30 known spawning sites, as well as hundreds of people equipped with the knowledge and skills to nurture these environments and create healthy waterways.

NISHRP is now focused on handing over guardianship of the spawning sites to local land owners and kaitiaki – offering tools, training, and restoration plans to support the next phase of this work, and helping to secure a future for the species.

Healthier terrestrial ecosystems

Around $484 million was invested into biodiversity outcomes. Different funds within the programme were designed to meet distinct objectives, reflecting the ecological and community diversity across New Zealand.

The largest single fund, Kaimahi for Nature, used a regional partnership-based approach. The fund prioritised local needs and was shaped by collaboration between councils, iwi, and local businesses. Although its primary purpose was to create nature-based employment in the wake of COVID-19, DOC leveraged existing relationships to rapidly identify and implement 'shovel-ready' projects focused on tangible, on-the-ground delivery.

Other funds were focused on specific outcomes such as the South Island Threatened Species Recovery, and Prevention of North Island Indigenous Forest Collapse. Others were designed to support stakeholder groups such as the Jobs for Nature Community Fund, the Māori Land Grant, and the Private Land Biodiversity Fund.

Across the programme, around half of all projects (52 per cent) reported supporting the restoration of terrestrial ecosystems. Terrestrial restoration activities covered nearly 7,500 hectares, with a key achievement being the planting of 3.5 million terrestrial plants.

Table 2: Annual terrestrial achievements

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Lifetime
Area of ecosystem restoration (hectares)	887	2,000	2,000	1,530	1,055	7,472
Length of tracks maintained (kilometres)	392	1,429	791	580	84	3,276
Terrestrial plants planted	110,598	2,021,757	769,651	321,247	144,232	3,367,485

The independent evaluation found the use of scientifically supported conservation methods, such as pest control, native planting, and habitat restoration, provides confidence in the likelihood of positive long-term outcomes. Sustaining these gains will also be supported by increased community engagement and the long-term, intergenerational approach taken by many iwi-led initiatives. In some instances, monitoring technology will enable continued remote data capture and reduced labour costs. However, without continued investment, restoration gains may not be maintained, and economic pressures could favour alternative land uses.

Credit: The Otago Peninsula Eco Restoration Alliance (OPERA)

CASE STUDY

Threatened species

DOC's Jobs for Nature programme invested in 225 conservation projects across Aotearoa, delivering 2.4 million hectares of pest control and planting more than 5 million native species. Sixty percent of these projects focused on ecosystem restoration, including work in biodiversity hotspots such as Resolution, Great Barrier, and Pitt Islands, and the South West New Zealand World Heritage Area. Additional support was directed to pest-free sanctuaries, enhancing safe habitats for native wildlife.

As well as creating employment, targeted funding supported some our most threatened species. These efforts resulted in better outcomes for threatened taonga, such as the examples below.

Hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin) rehabilitation and habitat protection

One of the rarest penguins, the nationally endangered hoiho faced declining populations and limited rehabilitation capacity. Jobs for Nature supported the Otago Peninsula Eco Restoration Alliance (OPERA) to rehabilitate 463 penguins, with a 98.5 per cent success rate during the funding period. With only 196 breeding pairs left in the northern population, nearly half of these now pass through the OPERA centre annually. Additionally, the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust employed three rangers, improving early intervention and care. They also planted 5,600 native trees to restore habitat.

Kākāriki karaka (orange-fronted parakeet) population recovery

In 2018/19, fewer than 230 of New Zealand's rarest parakeet remained in the wild. Through a partnership with Ngāi Tahu, Jobs for Nature funding supported baseline monitoring and predator identification across a 480-kilometre trapping network, which has reduced predator numbers. The population has since increased to around 510. While still critically endangered, the species is showing promising signs of recovery, with other native species also benefiting from the safer environment.

Protecting kauri and other iconic tree species from disease

Kauri dieback disease and myrtle rust pose serious threats to New Zealand's native forests, with some tree species now critically endangered. The dieback affects kauri – considered a taonga by many – and myrtle rust can threaten the iconic mānuka, pōhutukawa, and rāta, among other species. Jobs for Nature supported five community-led education and surveillance projects focused on reducing the spread of these diseases. Efforts have included mitigation, education, increasing public awareness and behaviour change, treatment, restoration, and surveillance. They identify disease-resistant trees in one region, laying the foundation for long-term forest health.

Identification of new native populations

Extensive back-country monitoring has led to the rediscovery of species not seen for decades. Jobs for Nature workers from Franz Josef Wilderness Tours, Ngāi Tahu, and Te Rūnanga o Makaawhio have separately recorded sightings of pekapeka (long-tailed bats) near Franz Josef, kākāriki karaka near Lake Sumner, and Ōkārito gecko in South Westland, highlighting the value of targeted fieldwork and local expertise.

Kākāriki karaka (orange-fronted parakeet).

Credit: DOC

Improved biosecurity

Several funds supported biosecurity outcomes. Most of the investment focussed on major invasive plant and animal threats to both natural ecosystems and productive farmland. The largest fund ($100 million) was MPI – Biosecurity New Zealand's National Wilding Conifer Control Programme, which sat alongside other specific pest-related funds. Biosecurity work was also embedded within many Jobs for Nature projects with around two in five projects reporting animal pest control (39 per cent) and plant pest control (37 per cent).

A wide range of contracted pest control activities delivered measurable progress. In total, animal pest control covered 1.88 million hectares for wallabies and 2.57 million hectares for other animal pests. Plant pest control treated 2.11 million hectares of wilding conifers and 0.7 million hectares of other pest plants. Most activity peaked in Year One or Year Two, reflecting contractual requirements and the number of active projects during those periods. Wallaby and wilding conifer control efforts delivered by MPI were completed in Year Four with both workstreams continuing past the conclusion of Jobs for Nature.

Table 3: Annual pest control achievements

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Lifetime
Area of animal pest control (hectares)	301,062	1,067,881	639,513	479,760	89,347	2,577,564
Area of plant pest control (hectares)	298,415	154,573	152,186	96,064	3,701	704,938
Area treated for wallabies (hectares)	195,017	606,012	553,955	517,348	5,100	1,877,432
Area treated for wilding conifers (hectares)	848,948	623,013	474,514	165,979	71	2,112,524

Significant progress has been made on the biosecurity front. However, as with other environmental outcomes, lack of maintenance can lead to re-invasion. Possum control can also alter predator-prey dynamics, occasionally benefiting other pest species. These risks highlight the need for integrated, multi-species approaches and adaptive monitoring to ensure pest control supports resilient terrestrial ecosystems.

CASE STUDY

Biosecurity

Wallabies are not a new problem, but they are a national pest problem that needs a joint effort to solve. The invasive, non-native species browses on native plants and pasture which negatively impacts forest regeneration and primary production.

Tipu Mātoro is a national eradication programme and a partnership of MPI's Biosecurity New Zealand, iwi and regional councils, the Department of Conservation, Land Information New Zealand, Federated Farmers, Forest & Bird, researchers, and communities. The aim is to contain wallabies where they are, stop them from spreading, and work towards a wallaby-free Aotearoa.

Since 2020, with $27 million in Jobs for Nature funding, the programme has been working to contain wallabies within their core population areas in Bay of Plenty and Canterbury. Any wallabies outside these areas are targeted for control, while the footprint of this introduced invasive species within the regions is also gradually shrinking.

In 2025 an independent evaluation of Tipu Mātoro reported the Aotearoa New Zealand Wallaby Strategy continues to have high relevance and value. It also reported the programme has laid solid foundations to effectively contain wallabies with a long-term vision of eradication. Progress has been made across three pou (Tūāpapa – Getting the system right, Whakahau – Empowering action, and Tiaki me te whakahaumanu – Protecting and restoring) and 12 key performance indicators. Highlights include:

- Control efforts are working with effective systems in place to ensure worker and public safety. The programme hit the targets for area covered by wallaby surveillance and control operations.
- Good practice guidelines were developed to support operational effectiveness with most toxin operations achieving a kill rate of 95 per cent or higher.

Wallaby with GPS collar.

Credit: Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research

South Waitaki, landscape.

Credit: Biosecurity New Zealand

- There has been an increase in community awareness on the damage pest wallabies do to the New Zealand environment.
- There is active capacity and capability building. Between 2020/21 and 2023/24 there was an increase in the number of workers with 12 months of wallaby control experience (eg, know how to work with wallaby detection dogs and apply toxins).
- Public reports of wallaby sightings increased from 280 in the first quarter in 2022 to 768 in the same period two years later, which is thought to reflect a successful public education and engagement programme.

Tipu Mātoro isn't stopping with the end of Jobs for Nature funding. MPI has committed $6.9 million baseline funding per year, most of which will go into control operations. There is also a focus on operational research to improve surveillance and control tools.

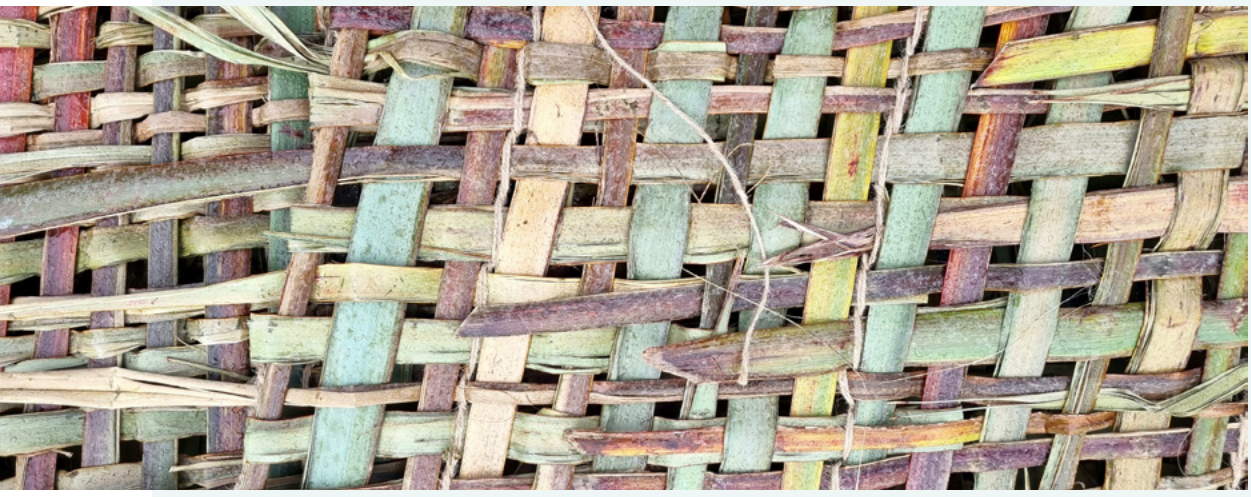
The independent evaluation of the programme sets a baseline for tracking the impact of future collaborative efforts and will also be used to inform the review of the strategy which is occurring in 2026.

Tirohanga Māori (perspective)

The overarching design of the Jobs for Nature programme aligned with Māori values and aspirations. Its environmental objectives resonated with Māori worldviews and the investment framework actively supported Māori partnerships and leadership across a wide range of projects.

The independent evaluation reported 44 per cent of projects funded (294 of 524 projects) and 31 per cent of funding allocated ($359 million of $1.2 billion) went to recipients self-reporting as Māori. Of the 20 Māori communities involved in the evaluation, many described the programme as transformative, enabling essential work on their whenua and opportunities to exercise rangatiratanga (rightful authority) and kaitiakitanga. However, some felt partnerships with agencies were ‘one-sided’, highlighting the need for adequate engagement processes and more meaningful involvement in decision-making.

For Māori, programme efforts supported the restoration of whenua that had been degraded or where mahinga kai had been lost. The work also enabled innovative ecosystem restoration approaches and supported the integration of mātauranga Māori into environmental solutions.



Te Arawa Lakes uwhi (harakeke weed mats).

Credit: LINZ

CASE STUDY

Te ao Māori

Rotorua Te Arawa lakes are iconic and nationally significant, offering rich environmental, cultural, and social value. However, over time, environmental pressures have compromised this value. Pest plants are becoming increasingly problematic, and in the past, only ad hoc pest plant control was being carried out. More recently, aquatic plant management plans were developed for 12 of the 14 lakes.

Te Arawa Lakes Trust (TALT), supported by funding from LINZ, has built a collaborative and innovative approach to tackle the problem. This work involves close partnership with Te Roopu Raranga ki Rotorua, which brings 10 generations of knowledge about raranga (weaving).

Supported by scientific evidence, the project involves a centuries-old solution to a modern challenge. Uwhi (large mats woven from harakeke) are laid in waterways to suppress pest plants and create habitat for native species such as kōura (crayfish), kākahi (freshwater mussel), and the common bully. Many of the weavers involved had lost employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the project has provided not only jobs, but a meaningful way to contribute to their community.

Trials began in December 2021, with uwhi laid in Lakes Tarawera, Rotomā, and Rotoiti. Each site has distinct topography and weed profiles, allowing divers to assess the effectiveness of uwhi in different conditions. TALT has monitored the sites regularly to track weed growth and kōura restoration. Uwhi have been found to be highly effective, offering a low-cost, locally sourced alternative to imported hessian mats. Even 12 months after installation, the mats continued to suppress weeds and remained largely intact, ensuring protection will continue for some time.

Te Arawa Lakes Trust biosecurity staff install uwhi in Lake Rotoiti, to suppress invasive underwater weeds and restore habitat.

Credit: LINZ

After success in the three lakes, the mātauranga Māori approach has now been extended to Te Kaikaitāhuna (Hamurana Springs). This provides an opportunity to test the effectiveness of uwhi in the waterways which feed into the lakes.

Locally grown harakeke is being used, continuing the symbiotic relationship between plant, soil, and water. The moving water in the streams presents a unique challenge and prompted local weavers to adapt their approach.

Following the conclusion of the LINZ Jobs for Nature project, TALT plans to continue using uwhi to control aquatic pest weeds and support taonga species such as kōura and kākahi in culturally significant sites. TALT is also engaging with other iwi and hapū to explore the potential use of uwhi in controlling other pest species and eradicating invasive species in specific areas.

Next steps include a potential master project for a Te Arawa member, focusing on the applications of uwhi in pest control and habitat restoration, though funding is not yet secured. TALT is also working with local schools to expand uwhi and engage with rangatahi. The ongoing work will enhance knowledge in raranga and contribute to restoring the mauri (life force) of Te Arawa Lakes.

Greater future environmental resilience

Resilience is the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and adapt to change. Jobs for Nature activity – spanning freshwater, terrestrial ecosystems, and wider landscapes – has addressed key environmental stressors and strengthened the processes that support long-term resilience. Enhanced ecosystem attributes such as water storage, habitat quality, and biological productivity contribute to overall resilience. Scale, diversity, and connectivity – all supported through the programme – provide the spatial resilience needed to mitigate and respond to climate change.

Regulatory implementation was an important driver for several funds, particularly those administered by MfE. The Essential Freshwater Fund, for example, shifted its focus to building capability and filling system gaps, including supporting the roll-out of freshwater farm plans. Other projects contributed directly to compliance by fencing waterways, protecting wetlands, and undertaking restoration aligned with freshwater regulations. Overall, 14 per cent of projects indicated they intended to support regulatory implementation.

Environmental resilience has been strengthened through:

- the scale of investment and on-the-ground delivery
- improved workforce capacity and capability
- increased community involvement in environmental work
- deeper collaboration among environmental groups and partners.

The scale of investment through Jobs for Nature has been significant, and combined with strong community and iwi commitment, has delivered gains that would not otherwise have been achieved. Despite New Zealand's small population, the country's COVID-19 recovery investment in the environment was among the largest globally.

Formal protection tools (such as QEII covenants) and new approaches developed through the programme will continue to deliver benefits beyond its duration. These include improved technology, mātauranga Māori-based solutions, and strengthened workforce models. The programme has also generated a clearer understanding of what works – and what does not – providing valuable insights to inform more effective future initiatives. Without the five years of Jobs for Nature funding, environmental outcomes would very likely have been significantly poorer.

The independent evaluation found that Jobs for Nature has laid the groundwork for enduring impact. However, the sustainability of these outcomes remains vulnerable to external pressures such as ongoing pollution and wider ecosystem degradation. Looking ahead, a constrained investment environment will limit the ability to maintain all gains made to date.

Right: Te Mauri o Waihou. Protecting and enhancing Te Puna (the Blue Spring).
Credit: Alison Maccoll

Reflections

How well did the programme do?

Delivering a $1.2 billion programme across five agencies, at pace, and during a pandemic was highly ambitious. The scale, speed, context, and cross-agency delivery model meant challenges were expected. The programme was designed with this in mind – aiming to deliver meaningful outcomes while also prioritising learning and adaptation as it progressed.

Jobs for Nature was independently evaluated by Allen + Clarke against evaluation criteria and assessment guidance agreed in 2022.

Table 4: Programme evaluation criteria

Emerging	Enabled	Established	Embedded
Evidence of **emerging performance**. Evidence is patchy or not clear overall. This may be because it cannot be seen yet (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, which is embedded as business as usual. No weaknesses of any consequence. Some examples of exemplary performance.

Jobs for Nature was assessed across five criteria. Overall, the programme was deemed to have:

- good effectiveness
- very good to excellent relevance and additionality
- fair coherence
- good sustainability, with some uncertainty at the programme's end.

The programme was assessed to be aligned with national strategies, and to have variable regional coordination.

Overall performance reflects the programme's design and its operating environment (not limited to the pandemic, inflationary pressures, and severe weather events).

Table 5: Breakdown of overall performance evaluation

Effectiveness **Good**	• The programme exceeded its employment targets and delivered substantial environmental outputs at scale. • It had effective programme architecture and cross-agency collaboration, mostly breaking down traditional government silos through strong coordination and shared incentives. • 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'.
Relevance **Very good – excellence**	• 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-19 response to environmental focus. • The programme was responsive to regional needs and could be tailored to diverse regional and iwi priorities.
Additionality **Very good – excellence**	• The programme demonstrated additionality by accelerating conservation work, turning known priorities which lacked funding into real projects, at a larger scale and faster pace than normal government budgets allow. • It created employment opportunities which likely would not have existed through standard labour market mechanisms – particularly valuable in conservation sectors typically constrained by funding. • The programme generated spillover benefits, including workforce capacity for emergency response (eg, Cyclone Gabrielle), local economic stimulation, and development of innovative conservation methods.
Coherence **Fair**	• The programme demonstrated coherence at the national level, with clear alignment to key strategies and successful job creation coordination which avoided duplication with other programmes. • Coherence at the regional level was variable. Regions with existing regional-level structures showed coordination through entities such as the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance. However, other regions had weaker coordination leading to risks of duplicated efforts and missed collaboration opportunities.
Sustainability **Good**	• The programme supported positive sustainability prospects through scientifically supported conservation practices with robust evidence bases. • Many participants successfully transitioned to permanent employment or secured ongoing contract work. • Formal preservation mechanisms such as QEII Trust covenants and land owner agreements were employed. • Sustaining programme benefits is challenging due to historic underfunding and ongoing environmental degradation, which may erode restoration gains over time.

Lessons for the future

A high-level view of the programme shows what worked well and areas for improvement. As the programme matured, several improvements were made. Some features – such as social procurement, matched co-funding, and innovation – were not applied consistently, but were assessed positively where they were used.

Credit: LINZ

What worked?

The independent evaluation found much of the programme worked well, and its effectiveness was driven by known success factors including:

- working collaboratively across strategic and operational levels
- a clear mandate for change
- decentralised control
- dedicated resources
- skill development
- information sharing.

A standout success factor was relationship-building. Investing in relationships at all levels strengthened programme delivery. For example, cross-agency collaboration improved when agencies engaged deeply with each other, sharing approaches such as procurement strategies and refining contracting models.

Regional collaboration also improved coherence. DOC's Regional Operations Group used local knowledge and existing relationships to guide investment decisions, and pre-existing structures such as Kotahitanga mō te Taiao supported more effective and strategic regional coordination.

Overall, project delivery was strongest where partnerships were actively cultivated with iwi, hapū, councils, land owners, and scientific institutions. These partnerships enabled better job creation, stronger environmental outcomes, and more culturally grounded approaches.

Areas for improvement

The main areas identified for improvement – data and contracting – reflect the speed at which the programme had to be stood up during COVID-19 lockdowns and amid forecasts of unemployment reaching 26 per cent. There was little time to build system foundations before delivery needed to begin at scale.

As a result, data and contracting processes became common pressure points for the Secretariat, agencies, and projects. The independent evaluation noted that future initiatives would benefit from spending more time upfront on these systems.

Data, reporting, and learning

Monitoring progress and demonstrating value for investment are essential. While the monitoring and evaluation programme was broad and showed that value was being delivered, several challenges remained. These included fragmented data systems – some predating the programme – and limited programme-level demographic reporting.

Future initiatives would operate better as an adaptive learning system with:

- a unified quarterly reporting system in place from the start, with clear and consistent definitions
- equity and inclusion metrics to better understand who benefits
- more deliberate identification and scaling of promising innovations
- mandatory, consistent project-closure reporting to show full programme value.

Procurement and contracting

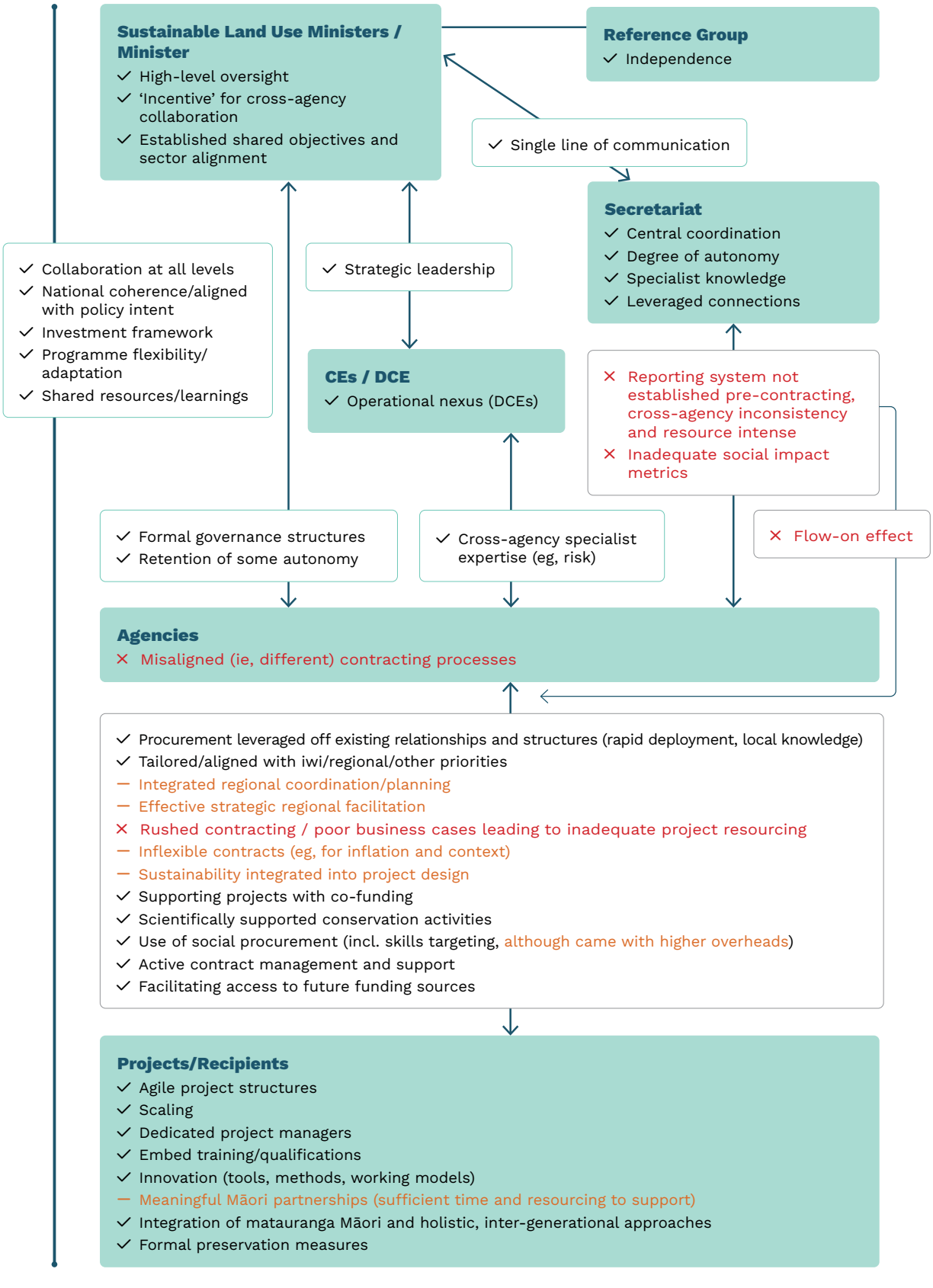
Effective procurement and contracting starts with good planning, but the need for rapid implementation limited the ability to design consistent approaches. Contracting models varied widely across agencies, causing confusion, inconsistent reporting, and high compliance costs – especially for organisations holding multiple contracts.

Future cross-agency funds could improve delivery and reduce friction by:

- being transparent about limited funding and decision-making criteria
- aligning contracting approaches, including payment models, from the outset, with clear expectations and social and sustainability outcomes embedded as core procurement objectives
- building in flexibility so projects can adapt to changing circumstances (eg, severe weather events) without compromising governance
- supporting smaller or less experienced organisations with active contract management and proportionate requirements (such as right-sized business cases), to ensure equity of access and delivery capability.

These recommendations on contracting and data are well established. They align with Auditor-General guidance for shared services and highlight the need for fit-for-purpose cross-agency systems.

Figure 6. How well did the programme do?



Future investment fund opportunities

Complex challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and economic resilience rarely fall within the mandate of a single agency. They require integrated, system-wide responses. Consolidated investments – like Jobs for Nature – can improve value for money, strengthen fiscal management, and create a better experience for partners and communities by providing a coordinated 'one-stop shop'. The programme offers several clear lessons for designing future funds of this kind.

Principles for future investment design

- **Focus investment where it matters most.** Demand significantly exceeded available funding. Future funds will need clear, tight priorities so investment is directed to the areas of highest public value and need.
- **Back innovation and research and development.** For example investing in scalable pest control tools and freshwater restoration technologies will support long-term environmental outcomes and help reduce costs over time.
- **Invest in capability, not just outputs.** Feasibility work, governance support, and workforce training may not deliver immediate outcomes, but they build the institutional and community capability needed for durable, long-term success – especially in under-resourced regions.
- **Diversify funding sources.** Mechanisms such as biodiversity credits, community co-investment, and outcome-based funding can help stabilise and expand funding pathways, reducing pressure on Crown investment alone.
- **Match scale and certainty to purpose.** Larger, well-defined investments tend to achieve more reliable delivery, while multi-year certainty supports better planning, workforce retention, and community partnerships.
- **Partner early with Māori organisations and iwi/hapū.** These partnerships align with Treaty obligations and consistently deliver strong public value, culturally grounded approaches, and effective conservation outcomes.
- **Prioritise interventions where government leadership is essential.** Some activities deliver high quantitative returns (eg, pest control, riparian planting, fish passage remediation), while others fill critical gaps where private or community investment would not occur without government support. Both types are important for a resilient environmental system.
- **Support ready to deliver projects for rapid impact where appropriate.** Economic return varied by region. Standouts like Hawke's Bay ($11.37) and Canterbury ($9.41) demonstrated the benefits of ready-to-go projects, combined – in Canterbury's case – with the scale of investment (average $3.7 million across 42 projects). These findings help inform when and where fast delivery models can be most effective.

Together, these lessons show that well-designed, well-coordinated investments can deliver meaningful results, even in challenging conditions. They also highlight where early system design, consistent data, and stronger contracting foundations can improve future delivery. Applying these insights will help ensure that the next generation of large or cross-agency programmes can achieve greater impact, with greater efficiency, for the communities and environments they serve.

Acknowledgements

Delivering a five-year, cross-government programme of this scale was only possible through the commitment of our communities and partners across New Zealand. We acknowledge again the many people and organisations who made Jobs for Nature possible. The programme's achievements reflect the collective effort of communities, iwi and hapū, councils, land owners, charitable trusts, businesses, and regional partners whose commitment to their environments and places has delivered lasting outcomes.

We also recognise the contribution of the Reference Group and Advisory Group members. Their independent expertise and advice helped guide the programme's direction, strengthen investment decisions, and supported effective regional and cross-agency delivery.

To our delivery agencies, thank you for your professionalism and resolve – particularly through the challenges of COVID-19, severe weather events, and tight timeframes. Your work ensured the programme was delivered responsibly, consistently, and with care.

Finally, we acknowledge the Ministers who oversaw the programme throughout its duration. Their support and engagement were essential in enabling the programme to maintain focus and momentum.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

Credit: Big Bay Awarua Conservation Trust project

Appendices

Appendix A: Funding allocation

The funding was distributed through different agency funds.

Agency	Programme	Funding amount
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment		**$40,931,781**
	Provincial Growth Fund	$40,931,781
Ministry for Primary Industries		**$188,015,606**
Te Uru Rākau – New Zealand Forest Service	One Billion Trees	$35,000,000
Biosecurity New Zealand	Containing Wallabies to Protect Agriculture, Forestry and Native Plants, and Boost Regional Economies	$26,790,606
	National Wilding Conifer Control Programme	$100,000,000
Agriculture and Investment Services	Agricultural Investment Services	$19,100,000
	Māori Agribusiness	$7,125,000
Ministry for the Environment		**$430,576,143**
	Freshwater Improvement Fund	$53,625,344
	At-Risk Catchments Fund	$12,000,000
	Essential Freshwater Fund	$132,287,710
	Jobs for Nature administration (MfE and Secretariat)	$36,176,143
	Kaipara Moana Remediation	$100,000,000
	Public Waterways and Ecosystem Restoration	$66,486,946
	Te Mana o te Wai	$30,000,000
Toitū te Whenua | Land Information New Zealand		**$40,000,000**
	Boffa Miskell – Aquatic and Terrestrial Weeds and Pests Control – Canterbury	$8,653,196
	Jobs for Nature Overheads LINZ	$3,784,000
	Strategic Projects Workstream	$27,562,804
Department of Conservation		**$485,278,000**
	Jobs for Nature Overheads DOC	$16,268,000
	Kiwis for Kiwi	$17,700,000
	Predator Free 2050 Ltd	$76,000,000
	Prevention of North Island Indigenous Forest Collapse	$53,806,000
	Kaimahi for Nature	$198,600,000
	Jobs for Nature Community Fund	$16,000,000
	Māori Land Grant	$25,680,000
	Ngā Awa	$42,918,000
	Private Land Biodiversity Fund	$18,000,000
	Programme 1 Quickstarts	$7,206,000
	QEII National Trust – Covenanting	$8,000,000
	South Island Threatened Species Recovery	$5,100,000

Appendix B: Programme history in more detail

Origin and design

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic created major uncertainty around social and economic impacts, with the Treasury projecting unemployment could peak between 13 per cent and 26 per cent.

At the same time, the Government was advancing freshwater and resource management reforms, improving biodiversity outcomes on public and private land and climate change response. The Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, and the first emissions reduction plan and national adaptation plan were in development.

To respond to pandemic concerns and build on existing work, Budget 2020 allocated approximately $1.2 billion for nature-related employment. Funding supported freshwater improvement, biosecurity, conservation, and biodiversity restoration. Following Cabinet approval, a time-limited programme, Jobs for Nature, was established.

Shared approach

Jobs for Nature was overseen by a joint Sustainable Land Use (SLU) Ministerial group, chaired by the Minister for the Environment. The group included Ministers responsible for allocations across five agencies, alongside the Minister of Climate Change and the Minister for Local Government.

Three overall objectives were established.

1. Create additional employment opportunities for 11,000 to 13,000 people, at pace and with regional spread.
2. Deliver enduring benefits for freshwater ecosystems and water quality, biodiversity, climate change, and cultural values.
3. Support sustainable land use and the implementation of new regulatory requirements, including for freshwater, biodiversity, and climate change.

SLU Ministers jointly approved projects valued at more than $1 million (except for existing initiatives such as One Billion Trees and the Provincial Growth Fund), and individual agencies approved smaller investments. Delivery accountability remained with each agency and its Minister.

Governance was supported by the following groups.

- A Reference Group (Year One) provided external oversight, assurance, and perspectives across local government, Māori, agriculture, non-government organisation, and sustainable business interests. This aligned with the bulk of funding decisions.
- An Advisory Group (Year Two) offered strategic advice to the programme and Ministers.
- Cross-agency officials' groups (including Chief Executives, Deputy Chief Executives, and operational working groups) focused on programme-wide risk, benefits, and communications.
- A cross-agency Secretariat, hosted and largely funded by the Ministry for the Environment (MfE), serviced Ministers, governance groups, and delivery agencies. Cross-agency (eg, Department of Conservation, Toitū te Whenua | Land Information New Zealand) contributions came in the form of secondments. The Secretariat:
  - › administered programme reporting (with support from MfE) and oversaw the benefits and evaluation workstream
  - › linked reporting to wider government initiatives, such as the Employment, Education and Training Secretariat (collective COVID-19 Recovery initiative quarterly reporting), and the Climate Change Interdepartmental Executive Board (biannually)
  - › delivered programme-wide communications, including the Jobs for Nature website, a regular newsletter, ad hoc updates requiring consistent messaging across agencies (eg, in response to severe weather events, alert level restrictions), and responses to programme enquiries from media and the public.

Change of government

Governance remained stable through the 2020–23 Labour Government. After the 2023 General Election, the incoming Minister for the Environment, Hon Penny Simmonds was briefed on the programme and delegated authority to the Associate Minister for the Environment, Hon Andrew Hoggard. Portfolio Ministers retained their responsibilities.

Programme evolution

In September 2020, ahead of the General Election, the Treasury's updated forecasts indicated a lower unemployment peak, but a more prolonged recovery. With unallocated funds still available, MfE and DOC presented incoming SLU Ministers with an opportunity to 'pivot' the programme. This shifted the focus from short-term job creation towards longer-term capability development and environmental improvement.

At this time, demand for environmental restoration activities was growing, with contestable Jobs for Nature funding streams heavily oversubscribed. In May 2021, Ministers directed agencies to place greater emphasis on environmental outcomes relative to employment outcomes when allocating remaining funding. This directive wove in capability and capacity building focused on addressing skills shortages in environmental restoration – skills essential to implementing freshwater improvement, biodiversity protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and resource management system reform.

Investment allocation

Early funding focused on rapid job creation to scale up existing contracts, reallocating displaced forestry workers to wilding conifer control, and prioritising 'shovel-ready' projects.

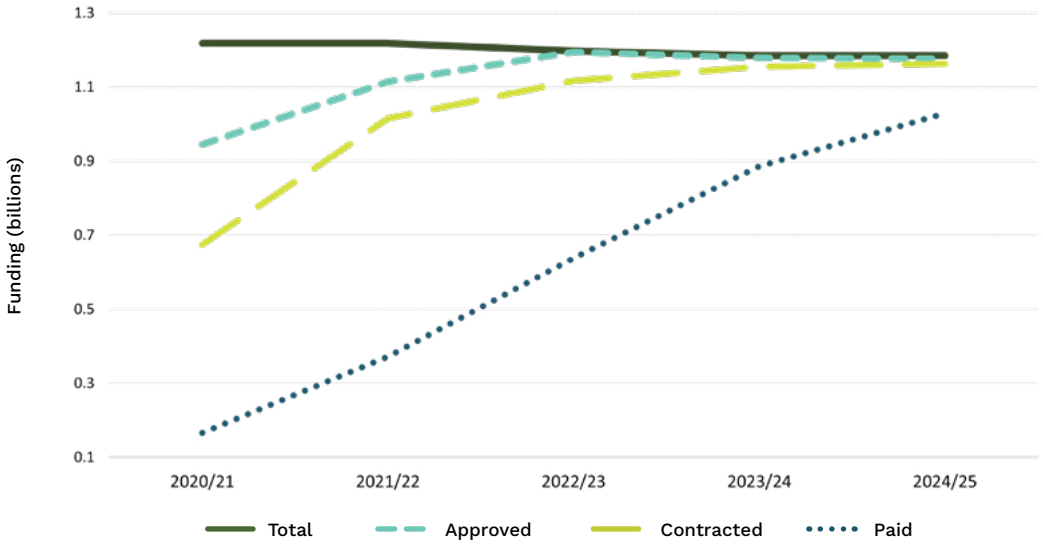
Reference Group's investment framework

In September 2020, the Reference Group developed an investment framework to inform:

- allocation of remaining funds – what became known as the Essential Freshwater and Te Mana o Te Wai funds (administered by MfE)
- project funding decisions (including at a ministerial level)
- programme-level benefits and evaluation design.

Nearly half the funding was committed before the framework was finalised, but all projects were included in programme-wide reporting and evaluation. By the end of Year One (June 2021), $941.8 million had been allocated across 343 projects.

Figure 7: Cumulative funding status (2020–25)



Returned and reprioritised funding

Over the course of the programme, some funding was either returned as savings through government Budget processes or reprioritised to non-Jobs for Nature initiatives.

- In 2021, $26.6 million was redistributed to support the roll-out of cameras on inshore commercial fishing vessels.
- In 2023, $11.55 million was redistributed to the Environmental Monitoring and Reporting System initiative.
- Through Budget 2023, $7.679 million of unallocated funding was returned. $850,000 was reallocated to support programme closure activities (such as this report, through 2025/26).
- Through Budget 2024, $14.018 million was returned from Vote Environment.

The final Jobs for Nature funding allocation totalled $1.185 billion, compared with the original allocation of $1.245 billion. $1.177 billion has been approved and $1.164 billion contracted out.

Monitoring progress

The Secretariat worked with the Reference Group and agencies to establish common project metrics for regular reporting. Although each project had its own contractual reporting requirements, shared metrics across agencies (confirmed in late 2020) enabled a consistent programme-level view of progress. Projects already under contract were asked to adopt the new metrics where feasible, with some requiring contract variations.

Three new employment metrics were developed in collaboration with Stats NZ, the Ministry of Social Development, and the Employment, Education and Training Secretariat.

Environmental metrics were developed collaboratively. Projects only reported on relevant metrics (eg, wilding conifer control projects did not report on animal pest control).

A quarterly reporting cycle was established, with delivery agencies submitting project metrics to the Secretariat. The data informed:

- a quarterly dashboard for SLU Ministers, and quarterly updates on the Jobs for Nature website
- annual reviews combining programme-wide insights with individual project case studies, culminating in this five-year report.

Table 6: Jobs for Nature programme annual review reports

Annual review year	Link
Year ended June 2021	Jobs for Nature Annual Review – Year One
Year ended June 2022	Jobs for Nature Annual Review – Year Two
Year ended June 2023	Jobs for Nature Annual Review – Year Three
Year ended June 2024	Jobs for Nature Annual Review – Year Four
Year ended June 2025	This final report

Delivery confidence

To support programme oversight, ‘delivery confidence’ reporting was established early in 2021. Agencies assessed projects quarterly using a RAG (red, amber or green status across five criteria (time, cost, outputs, dependencies, and skills and capability), with commentary on progress and actions underway. This assessment tracked progress and guided agencies’ interactions with projects to support successful delivery. These reports were completed for projects valued at $1 million or more of Crown funding and then aggregated to produce a programme level rating.

Benefits, impacts and evaluation

The story of Jobs for Nature goes beyond environmental and employment metrics. The programme's scale and complexity make robust evaluation essential, to capture broader social, cultural, and environmental benefits.

In 2021, guided by both the Reference and Advisory Groups, an evaluation and benefits workstream was established. A range of internal reports (coordinated or written by the Secretariat) and external reports (commissioned by the Secretariat) were produced.

Employer and employee surveys were also conducted in 2022. The response rate for the employer survey was high which means we can use the results in the programme benefits analysis and evaluation. Unfortunately, very few employees responded to the employee survey. Out of a potential 3,578 respondents, 107 people responded to the survey. This means the survey responses aren't a statistically valid sample and we can't use them to draw conclusions about the programme.

Table 7: Jobs for Nature programme Secretariat reports

	Subject	Link
Programme benefits report	Mid-term (2022) evaluation of the programme's social, environmental, and economic impacts, drawing on employer and employee surveys	Jobs for Nature programme benefits report 2022
Interim evaluation	Lessons from the first two years (2023)	Jobs for Nature Programme – Interim Evaluation 2023
Regional and project profiles	Various reports released periodically from December 2023, outlining emerging benefits at project and regional levels	Publications: Jobs for Nature

Upgrading the Alex Knob track by the Inflite Skydive Franz Josef team for the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support project. Credit: DOC

Table 8: Jobs for Nature programme external reports

Workstream	Report	Link
Allen + Clarke independent evaluation	Year One (2022/23) Focus – set-up lessons, early results	Jobs for Nature Evaluation – Year One Report
	Year Two (2023/24) Focus – project-level insights	Jobs for Nature Evaluation – Year Two Report
	Te Ao Māori evaluation (2024)	Te Ao Māori Evaluation – Jobs for Nature
	Year Three (2024/25) Focus – cross-agency model	Evaluation of Jobs for Nature – Year 3 report
	Overall summary (2025)	$1.2 billion for nature: What Jobs for Nature delivered
	Various thematic case studies	Publications: Jobs for Nature
Martin Jenkins economic impact analysis	Understanding economic impacts (2023)	Jobs for Nature – Mahi mō te Taiao: Understanding economic impacts of the programme
	2024 update	Jobs for Nature impact assessment: Final Report
	Final 2025 update	Jobs for Nature 2025 Q4 impact assessment
ImpactLab social impact analysis	GoodMeasure portfolio (2024)	Jobs for Nature programme – GoodMeasure Portfolio Overview

External interest and scrutiny

Independent audit

In early 2021, the Reference Group commissioned an independent audit of the programme to support its oversight and assurance role. RDC Group Ltd conducted the audit (completed in May 2021), which included a high-level programme review and a deep dive into six selected projects.

Joint Chief Executives and SLU Ministers considered the audit recommendations, and the majority were acted on. Key outcomes included the establishment of a cross-agency risk committee, and the continuation of an independent Advisory Group through to June 2022. The Advisory Group also explored communities of practice to support a future transition strategy.

DPMC stocktake

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Implementation Unit undertook a stocktake of Jobs for Nature in September and October of 2021. The stocktake noted good progress and recognised the shift in emphasis due to a stronger-than-expected labour market. Ministers agreed the programme should continue and report progress back to Cabinet (which occurred in April 2023). Operational recommendations were also considered and acted on – for example, by enabling project-level full-time equivalent targets to be adjusted on a case-by-case basis, to achieve greater long-term employment or environmental objectives.

Parliamentary scrutiny

The Environment Select Committee twice requested (in 2020 and 2021) joint sectoral hearings, involving MfE, DOC and the Secretariat. The response was coordinated by the Secretariat, and reports (including from the Office of the Auditor-General) were published on the Parliament website. The programme was also subject to numerous written Parliamentary questions and requests under the Official Information Act 1982.

Wider interest

As the Jobs for Nature programme matured, external interest grew. Notable enquiries included:

- the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use in Tairāwhiti-Gisborne and Wairoa (2023)
- an Australian Government delegation (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water), with MfE, visiting Ngāti Toa Rangatira project sites (2023)
- the Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned (April 2024).

Delivery challenges

Some projects faced internal challenges, including:

- impacts of severe weather events (eg, Nelson-Tasman flooding in late 2022, Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle in early 2023)
- local labour market challenges
- COVID-19 response alert level restrictions
- rising inflation and supply chain constraints (materials and equipment) impacting project costs.

In some cases, contract variations were agreed within existing budget allocations (eg, rescoped project milestones, extended contract deadlines). Four projects were withdrawn.

Transition and conclusion

Strategy and Tūhono Taiao online resource

The 2021 audit identified the need for a transition strategy to help projects and delivery partners plan for sustainable outcomes beyond programme funding. The audit also highlighted the importance of fostering communities of practice to enhance collaboration.

Published in June 2023, the Transition Strategy took into account the time-limited nature of the programme and the diversity projects, so intentionally took a high-level approach. Key features included:

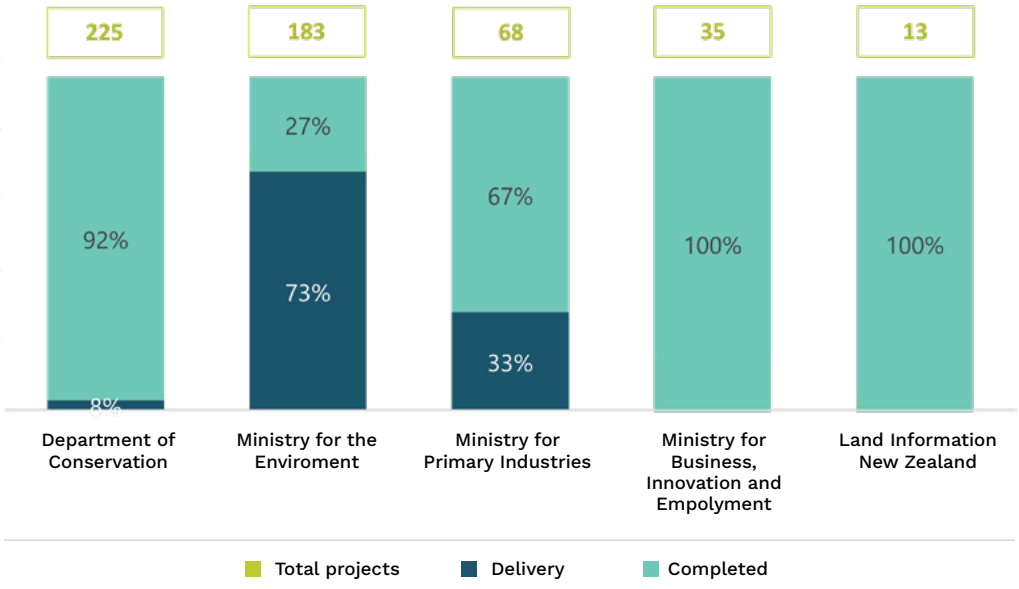
- agencies working with delivery partners to plan pathways beyond Jobs for Nature
- the development of an online platform – Tūhono Taiao (Nature Connections) – which was publicly released in 2024, to enable projects to connect with each other, share resources, and access transition opportunities.

Programme conclusion

Kānoa, LINZ and MPI (wallabies and wilding conifer control) projects funded under Jobs for Nature concluded at the end of Year Four (30 June 2024). Wallaby and conifer control projects have continued as part of MPI's business as usual work programme from 1 July 2024.

By the end of Year Five (30 June 2025), 66 per cent of approved Jobs for Nature projects (348 of 524) were completed. The remaining 175 contracted projects will continue, with their respective agencies providing oversight until contracts end (the majority in the 2025/26 financial year).

Figure 8: Project delivery status, by agency



Some completed projects secured funding from other revenue sources (such as community grants, other government funds, philanthropic support) and are continuing their work.

The Secretariat function concludes in November 2025. The Jobs for Nature website will be kept live until May 2026, programme reports will be archived on the MfE website, and programme data stored on MFE's data service.

Credit: Te Tautiaki Hoiho Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust

Appendix C: Benefits map

Natural environment	Human capability and social cohesion	Financial and physical
Longer-term benefits 10+ years		
• Improved resilience of ecosystems to the impacts of climate change • Reduced environmental degradation of New Zealand's ecosystems • Contribution to climate change mitigation	• Sustainable jobs in environment-based roles as careers are enablers, new pathways for environmental management are created	• Savings to the New Zealand economy from environmental damages
Benefits 5 – 10 years		
• Improved terrestrial & aquatic biodiversity • Improved water quality of streams/rivers/lakes	• Highly skilled workforce • Increased skills & capability of individuals to collaborate & respond to environmental management issues • Māori are enabled to realise their aspirations regarding the environment • Improved health & wellbeing of individuals & whānau • Connection to nature for individuals & whānau	• Contribution to sustainable tourism growth
Short- to medium-term outcomes 3 – 5 years		
• Environmental protection of New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity • Reduced biosecurity risks from plant and animal pests	• Increased employment opportunities • Increased connection to land, kaitiaki roles supported and filled by Māori • Increased awareness of environmental issues in general population • Improved capability of individuals & Māori to work in environment-based work	
Programme objectives		
Objectives	1 Create 11,000 jobs in regions that need work the most.	2 Establish enduring benefits for healthy waterways, biodiversity, climate change & cultural values.
		3 Support sustainable land use and the implementation of regulatory requirements, including for fresh-water, biodiversity & climate change.
Activities and outputs		
• Pest control of plants • Pest control of animals • Freshwater restoration • Ecosystem restoration • Recreation enhancement	• Delivery partnerships with local government/iwi/voluntary sector • Increased involvement of community and private sectors • People spend time in nature through the programme • Regulatory Implementation • Capability development • Developing cultural health monitoring frameworks • Creating a diverse labour force with a wide set of skills • Training & development opportunities for participants • Supporting iwi/hapū aspirations and give effect to the Treaty of Waitangi • Water quality monitoring • Restoration of historical cultural sites • Support to community aspirations to improve their local environment	• $1.2 billion invested across five agencies with regional spread
Challenges		
• New Zealand faces long standing sustainability and environmental challenges • Opportunity to improve delivery of environmental outcomes	• COVID-19 was expected to result in high levels of unemployment • Need to build an enduring workforce across the environment sector • Need to respond to new regulatory developments	• Businesses & sectors were significantly challenged by lockdowns

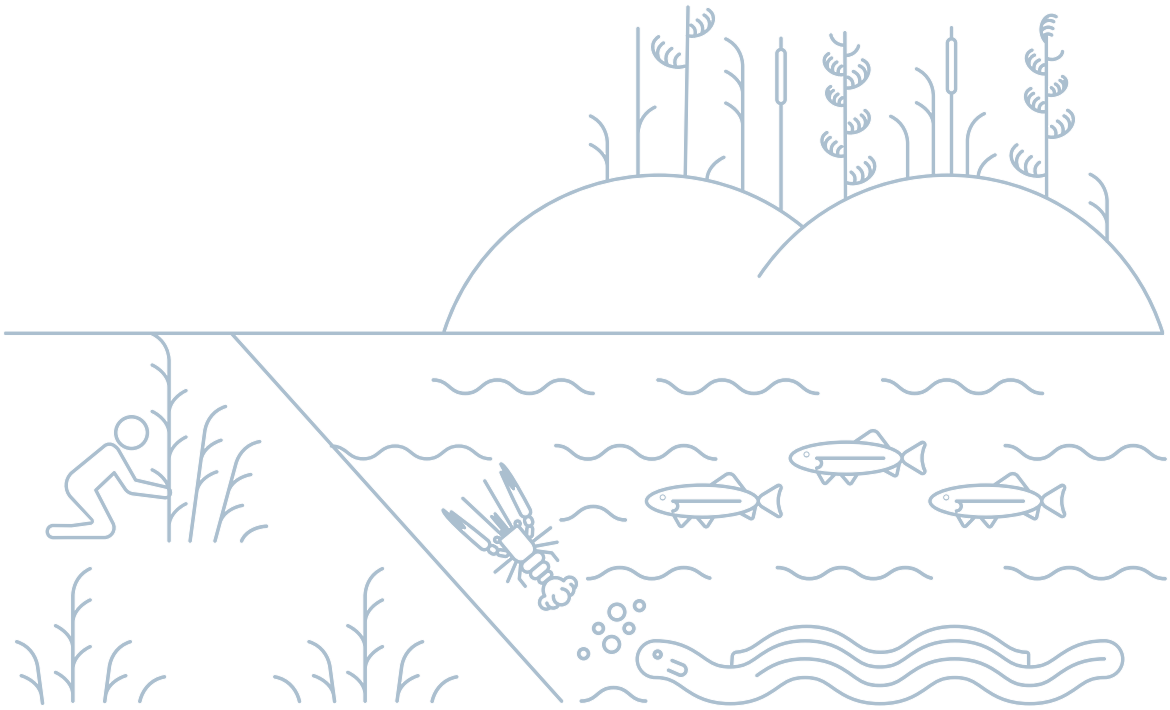
Appendix D: Data sources and review process

This review draws on multiple sources, including the Jobs for Nature evaluation workstream, quarterly reporting, individual project closure reports, and relevant research. Use of independent analysis was prioritised, to strengthen objectivity.

Several factors constrained the quality and comparability of programme-level data.

- The reporting system at a programme level was not in place before contracting, leading to inconsistencies across agencies (remedied in late 2020) and gaps in key areas, notably participant demographics.
- Project closure reporting was not initially required, meaning programme-wide consistency only began from late 2022, after many projects had already concluded.
- Agencies' review processes allowed retrospective adjustments to output metrics as part of quality control. Although this improved accuracy at the project level, it introduced variation in programme data, which became more noticeable as more projects closed.
- Environmental and spillover benefits often take 10 to 30 years to materialise, limiting what can be reported.
- Some environmental and cultural values, such as New Zealand's unique biodiversity are intangible and not suited to monetisation.

With the programme now closed, this report has not undergone independent review. However, quality and data assurance processes were in place throughout.



Appendix E: Jobs for Nature Advisory Group Investment Framework

Aligned with the programme's overall objectives, the following framework guided investment decisions.

Programme objectives

- Creation of about 11,000 jobs at pace and with regional spread.
- Enduring benefits for healthy waterways, biodiversity, climate change and cultural values.
- Supporting sustainable land use and the implementation of regulatory requirements, including for freshwater, biodiversity, and climate change.

Cabinet's investment principles and direction for action

ENVIRONMENTAL

Phased approach
Where programmes can be delivered immediately, they should be. However, if more planning or human resources would deliver greatly enhanced environmental outcomes, then this should occur provided it does not compromise the employment objectives.

Enhance the environment
Where applicable, project conditions will require measures to ensure that environmental benefits persist over the long term, for example by including elements to prevent future degradation.

ORGANISATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Leverage what exists
Use existing organisations and structures if they can be made fit-for-purpose. Developing new structures takes time and risks creating overlaps.

FINANCIAL AND DELIVERY

Coordinated but distributed
Programme decision-making and oversight delivered centrally, yet well connected and project managed locally. Decisions about funding individual projects will be delegated as much as possible.

Regional delivery
Only at place can the workforce be effectively connected with training and job opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT

Speed and certainty are critical
Funding decisions need to be made quickly for a significant proportion of the available funding so people can access job opportunities as soon as possible.

Rapid deployment
Use resourcing to overcome barriers to rapid deployment. In normal circumstances, the Crown would seek a significant private contribution to projects – typically around half. This takes time and risks compromising the primary employment objective.

Additionality
Funding must lead to additional activity and employment – not simply use Crown funding to fund what would have happened anyway (although can accelerate things that would have happened over a longer timeframe).

Ready for delivery
Fund specific projects ready for delivery – not proposals that are at an early stage of development.

Funding areas

Natural environment
- Freshwater ecosystems
- Biodiversity
- Biosecurity
- Sustainable land use
- Climate change (co-benefits)

Human capability and social cohesion
- Cultural values
- Partnerships
- Wellbeing

Focus of projects
- Operational work
- Monitoring
- Capability building
- Implementing regulatory reform

Region/location
- Land tenure

Assessment principles – what we do

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

1. **Targeting of projects**
   a) Evidence that projects and other aligned initiatives have been targeted based on a holistic system-view of catchments and ecosystems; or
   b) Projects target interventions that are known to have a broad and strong influence on environmental outcomes within an ecosystem or catchment; or
   c) Projects fit within a regional/catchment strategy
2. **Projects create enduring outcomes beyond the life of the funding**
3. **Projects are linked to long-term monitoring and reporting of environmental outcomes**
4. **Across the programme, there are projects that:**
   a) Increase the quality of knowledge and data used to design and evaluate projects
   b) Trial innovative approaches

EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENT

1. **A mix of:**
   a) Enduring jobs leading to careers that fill known capacity and capability gaps
   b) Jobs for employees of distressed businesses
2. **Jobs that address existing employment disparities**
   a) Rangatahi/youth
   b) Māori
3. **Training and capability building either within projects or dedicated funding**

1

Assessment principles – how we do it

ORGANISATION AND PARTNERSHIPS ASSESSMENT

1. **The ways projects are funded, managed by departments/ministries and delivered**
   a) Builds delivery partnerships between central government, local government and iwi/hapū/whānau
   b) Increases partnerships with Māori and provides leadership opportunities
   c) Increases involvement and engagement of community and private sector in environmental projects
   d) Are appropriate to the capabilities of the funding recipients with support where required

FINANCIAL AND DELIVERY ASSESSMENT

1. **Level of co-funding or co-resourcing/in-kind**
2. **Value for money**
3. **Regional equity and delivery including agency distribution**
4. **Appropriate monitoring and reporting built into the projects**
5. **Phasing funding and assurance to enable ongoing agility, especially if some projects required the need to 'pivot'**

2

Risk management

RISK, DEPENDENCIES AND MITIGATIONS ASSESSMENT

Assessing how agencies manage and share the following risks with funding recipients:
- Regulatory compliance
- Health and safety
- Non-delivery
- Delayed delivery
- Cost overruns and underspend
- Extreme events
- Delays in supply of material and labour
- Ongoing liability and maintenance
- Scalability of physical resources
- System implications and unintended consequences

Important note: Potential risks need to be identified and mitigated, with funding to be delivered with certainty, and additionality wherever possible. The Reference Group may see a need to 'pivot' funding where required as projects progress.

+

Overview and assurance of programme

This framework sets the expectations of the Advisory Group across the whole jobs for Nature programme and will be used to frame any provided advice. It will be reviewed annually.

Application of the framework
a) Providing advice to agencies about any re-allocation of existing funding
b) Advice as investment signals/guidance to those developing future programmes
c) Retrospectively to evaluate the success of programme delivery
d) Influenced by the monitoring and reporting information from each funding stream

Monitoring and reporting framework

Supporting of wellbeing in the Wealth of Aotearoa New Zealand must be evident through the funding streams including through investment in social cohesion, human capability, natural environment, and financial and physical capital.

ADVISORY GROUP ADVICE AND GUIDANCE, INCLUDING GAPS ASSESSMENT

Appendix F: 2024/25 achievements

The following information reports on progress for the programme's fifth and final year.

Table 9: 2024/25 people achievements – quarterly

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
People currently employed (point in time)	1,685	1,588	1,478	602
Employment starts (cumulative)	15,314	15,641	15,874	15,964
Hours worked (cumulative)	12,239,795	12,695,775	13,063,831	13,275,891

Table 10: 2024/25 environmental and other achievements – cumulative quarterly

Category	Metric group	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2024/25
Biodiversity	Area of ecosystem restoration (hectares)	566	198	206	84	1,055
	Length of tracks maintained (kilometres)	38	27	12	6	84
	Assets maintained including huts	11	9	17	1	40
	Plants planted	33,440	0	55,701	55,091	144,232
Freshwater	Area of freshwater restoration (hectares)	198	143	25	204	571
	Area under farm environment plans (hectares)	3,721	4,474	2,339	5,936	16,469
	Fencing constructed (kilometres)	148	135	129	158	571
	Farm environment plans completed	41	59	52	51	203
	Fish passages remediated	20	50	157	0	228
	Freshwater plants planted	912,059	477,977	176,488	474,899	2,041,423
Pest control	Area of animal pest control (hectares)	44,668	33,224	11,254	202	89,347
	Area of plant pest control (hectares)	2,331	654	639	76	3,701
	Area treated for wallabies (hectares)	5,100	0	0	0	5,100
	Area treated for wilding conifers (hectares)	65	6	0	0	71

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

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