THECATALYSTGROUP
planning and environment

BETTER TOGETHER?

A REVIEW OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION HUBS IN NEW ZEALAND

7 APRIL 2020

PREPARED BY:

Dr Marie A. Doole

……

REVIEWED BY:

Dr Fleur Maseyk

……

CONTRACT REPORT NO:

2020/153

……

PREPARED FOR:

Predator Free NZ Trust

……

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The author would like to thank those interviewed for this report for taking time out of their busy lives to share their insights. Thanks are also due to Dr Monica Peters, Clare Feeney and Annette Lees who carried out the seminal research in this space, upon which this report draws heavily.

THECATALYSTGROUP
planning and environment

FOREWORD

In recent years community conservation has seen a flurry of activity as people step up to do their bit to help remove introduced predators from Aotearoa to enable our native species to thrive. New community groups are setting up alongside well-established groups and the land area under predator control is rapidly increasing. This is all very positive and highlights the strong desire of New Zealanders to protect our native species.

However, with an increased number of groups working across the landscape the demand for technical expertise, access to resources and advice around governance and operations has grown significantly. The existing support structures aren't designed to cope with the increased demand and in some cases it is distracting key staff from more important work. There is also significant frustration from groups trying to access the expertise and they quickly become disheartened by lack of engagement from agencies.

We need to look at new ways to support groups and individuals and ensure they are enabled to be as effective and efficient as possible. It is essential we minimise unnecessary duplication and prevent everyone reinventing the wheel.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 2017 report "Taonga of an Island Nation" suggested a national network of regional hubs to help support community conservation groups in each region. It identified there are core services that all community groups are doing (and don't necessarily want to) that a centralised support structure could alleviate. It also recognised that similar organisations are already operating in some parts of the country.

In 2018 we commissioned a report from The Catalyst Group's Dr Marie Doole (nee Brown) called "Transforming Community Conservation Funding in NZ" to ensure the right support mechanisms and funding streams were in place to ensure desirable conservation outcomes. One of the recommendations was that hubs should be explored further as a way to minimise the administrative burden on groups and enable them to spend more time on the ground.

Hubs, on the surface, appear to have a lot of promise and may be an effective way to help groups coordinate, share resources and expertise. It seems logical that better coordination will enable groups to spend more time on the ground and ultimately lead to better conservation outcomes.

But does this assumption stand up to scrutiny and under what circumstances are hubs most effective? What do hubs need to thrive and how do we ensure they are of additive value and not just another layer competing for the same pool of funding?

To explore this more thoroughly we commissioned Dr Marie Doole from The Catalyst Group to take a strategic look at the promises and pitfalls of the hub concept. Her report also makes recommendations on refining implementation and provides insights for different stakeholders to consider.

Jessi Morgan and Rebecca Bell
PFNZ Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community conservation hubs can be regarded as something of a phenomenon. Their purpose and utility are viewed in different ways by different people and different sectors. There is no universally accepted definition of a 'community conservation hub', and doubtless they function differently in different settings. This research attempts to give further clarity to a complex and evolving context for hubs.

Hubs are a new concept in the conservation scene, but some interviewees questioned how novel and unexpected their evolution really is. For some the emergence of hubs seemed like a natural extension of disparate groups operating across a landscape to try to work together to increase their collective Impact, as working in isolation naturally limited their capability.

Common to all versions of hubs is that they require investment, and this comes from funds that are all, or at least partially, tagged for conservation. This research considers what success looks like for hubs, described in terms of conservation outcomes, and what barriers might exist to that success. This information is important for determining how, when, and why to invest in hubs and for gaining a greater understanding of the extent to which they add value to the community conservation sector. It will also assist existing community groups and agencies with decisions about how they will work with hubs.

To focus this analysis, we assumed the following objective was central to the definition of community conservation hubs:

> 'To catalyse community conservation efforts to improve outcomes for biodiversity'

This objective is commonly implicit in the investment case for funding community hubs, and at times explicitly outlined.

Our research indicates that although hubs are a promising concept in theory – even to be considered a logical progression – there are clear signs that current implementation of the concept is not optimal, and may lead to conservation funding being lost on a subset of the sector that is not able to upscale efforts as intended. Funders, agencies, and hubs themselves and their participants should be mindful of these early warning signs. To assist in addressing them, our analysis sets out what we consider to be the key strategic issues, and which points are particularly relevant for different stakeholders to consider.

Key strategic findings on community conservation hubs are that:

- Hubs must be the bridge between strategy and practice ('translators')
- Diversity in engagement is needed to bring communities along
- Funding must follow function
- Evaluating value-add of hubs is critical
- A central support body at a national scale would likely assist and improve outcomes

There is no reason that with a supportive community, the right skills, and adequate resourcing, that hubs of the future will not be able to be reliable catalysts of landscape scale outcomes, but work is needed to take us there.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Community conservation hubs are the subject of much, if very recent, discussion in New Zealand. The New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy currently subject to consultation proposes that by 2025 there will be a 'complete network of biodiversity hubs across New Zealand', an outcome supported by a proposed review of hubs (not the report herein) and the establishment of 'a national support system for coordination and oversight' if required (DOC 2019). In her 2018 report 'Taonga of an island nation', the former Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Dr Jan Wright recommended the establishment of regional conservation hubs to coordinate regional activities and provide support (PCE 2018). The Department of Conservation (DOC) has recently opened for application a bespoke funding round, focused specifically upon supporting existing community conservation hubs.[1] Feeney and Lees (2019) also identified that hubs would likely grow due to 'new funding opportunities' for them and because their value is appreciated by community collectives (p.5).

There is no generally accepted definition of a community conservation hub. In general, hubs are regarded as frameworks or support structures for 'on the ground' conservation groups. A hub has the potential power to direct community effort towards a common goal, acting as a multiplier. This is appealing from a funding perspective because this enables any sum of money provided to be multiplied in its impact and potentially assist many groups within a single transaction. This research aims to undertake a critical review of the concept and if appropriate consider what a more specific definition might be.

There is value in community drivers for conservation. It is acknowledged that conservation is a highly technical science in the main and there are aspects likely to transcend the capacity and capability of mainly volunteer groups. Some aspects of conservation must be left to agencies. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that many such volunteers would not offer their time and skills on the scale they do for an agency-led initiative, and the independent community-based drivers behind conservation groups are essential to their success.

Devolution of conservation imperatives to communities is a recent trend In New Zealand, arising perhaps over the last decade. It has strengths in helping to engage the populous, but is not without strategic risk, especially where the tasks devolved are unmet by adequate community capacity, capability or interest (Brown et al. 2015). Many existing conservation strategies rely heavily on community engagement, social license and attracting the participation of private landowners. Some of the bigger landscape opportunities seem unlikely to happen without community drivers that sustain effort as political pendulums swing back and forth. A strategic context that maps needs and matches those with capability is essential. Conservation works when community conservation is an effective complement to core efforts.

[1] The 2020 round of the DOC Community Fund was released with a specific subset of funding directed at 'established hubs to build the capability and capacity of community conservation groups'. The total fund quantum was $1 million over 3 years, having been extended from earlier proposed timeframe of one year (the value however did not change). The purpose of the time extension was ostensibly in recognition of the time it takes to bring about community change. Notwithstanding this, the quantum on offer is small and is unlikely to be transformative anyway. See more at https://www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/funding/doc-community-fund/before-you-apply/

METHODOLOGY

Community conservation hubs exist in an evolving context with few criticisms applying universally. This research started with a comprehensive review of the small but burgeoning literature in this space. In defining what a community conservation hub is, and what their role is, this report draws heavily on previous research on community conservation hubs in particular:

- 'Understanding the context of conservation community hubs' by Monica Peters for the Department of Conservation
- 'Pest Free Auckland: Enhancing conservation knowledge and capability. A strategy, implementation and evaluation plan', a report prepared for the Auckland Council by Annette Lees and Clare Feeney

Further research at a more detailed hub level would be advantageous, and in particular it would be useful to engage deeply and at scale with the community conservation sector members that are 'serviced' by hubs to get a broad understanding of their perspectives. Time did not permit a detailed analysis here.

The core of this research is informed by interviews of people and groups within the community conservation sector, including expert key informants. A full list of interviewees can be found in Appendix 1. The interviews were carried out in a stepwise fashion, speaking with key informants first to scope and frame the analysis and then more detailed discussions with others as a complement. The findings from the interviews were used to describe hubs, the positives and negatives present in practice and to answer the question 'Are we better together?'.

Throughout this research, we have relied on several assumptions[2]:

1. That funding and interest in both supporting and promoting the establishment of community conservation hubs has and will continue to increase in line with strategic goals of upscaling community conservation.
2. That community conservation has positive ecological and social benefits such that public monies should be appropriately directed towards supporting it within certain conditions.
3. That with the right support and enabling mechanisms, community conservation efforts can be upscaled and broadened to achieve landscape scale conservation outcomes alongside agencies and other stakeholders.

Success of a hub largely depends on what the intention is, and intentions may be manifold. A central assumption underpinning this report is that for hubs to be successful they must include a goal to:

> 'catalyse community conservation efforts to improve conservation outcomes'

Evaluations based on social engagement, wellbeing or other outcomes may well yield different outcomes. It is also acknowledged that the above is a narrow definition and many other benefits accrue from collaboration in conservation than a change in state and trend of species or ecosystems.

[2] We acknowedge that these assumptions are not straightforward and we do not undertake the analysis to validate them here, such assessment is out of scope for this report.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CONSERVATION HUB?

The concept of a hub has proved desirable to philanthropists, government agencies and other entities, and there are moves to direct further sums of funding for this purpose, including to 'seed' hubs. However, despite all the interest, many stakeholders still appear to be in the dark as to what a hub is, what it does and what its effect on conservation outcomes might be. A community conservation hub has been previously defined by the Department of Conservation as a 'self-sustaining entity that holds a vision for a defined geographic extent, whose purpose is to provide support to groups/individuals who help deliver this vision'.

Peters (2019) developed a different definition being 'an aggregation of community groups that have come together to form a large entity: an entity that supports collective community group action', thus dropping the requirement for them to be self-sustaining. The lack of specificity can mean that in practice hubs can struggle to differentiate themselves from existing organisations that work in similar or adjacent spaces (e.g., some environment centres that focus mainly on domestic sustainability issues). Not being able to make clear their distinct role can mean they struggle to secure funding.

Existing hubs or hubs like structures can be divided into four broad categories based on 50 hubs nationwide with differing characteristics (Peters 2019):

(1) National networks (e.g., societies regularly hosting a conference or similar)

(2) National programmes (e.g., provide training and conservation/ education experiences)

(3) Regional hubs networks and programmes (e.g., Regional Biodiversity Fora)

(4) Sub-regional hubs networks and programmes (e.g., Environment Centres)

In this report we focus primarily on the latter two categories.

HUBS – WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT WHAT THEY DO?

Peters (2019) identified that the four categories of hubs covered a range of organisation focus including 'all species and habitats within a defined geographic area' to specific ecosystem types (e.g., National Wetland Trust), class (e.g., BirdsNZ), order (e.g., Kiwis for Kiwi), or single (iconic) species' (Peters 2019). Peters Identified key issues with hub operation and then concluded:

> *Overall, hubs' 'value add' component is their independence from government and regulatory responsibilities. Hubs can be responsive and agile in ways that large, hierarchical organisations cannot. The trend toward more groups working together and new hubs forming will continue. Strengthening the capacity of existing hubs would help avoid duplication of effort and excess complexity in a dynamic, multi-layered conservation landscape.*

This analysis strongly supports these conclusions.

In an Auckland context, Feeney and Lees (2019) illustrated that community conservation hubs were primarily 'enablers' of conservation activity through their work. Feeney and Lees (2019) identified that the community conservation sector could broadly be divided into two separate groups – 'hands on action people' and hubs themselves. It was clear from their research that the two groups have different motivations, strengths, interests and functions and both are important.

The same report also makes the key assumption that enhancing capability of hubs would be the (generally) most efficient means of enhancing capability of the community groups ('hands on action people') (Feeney & Lees 2019). Some examples of the sorts of work hubs do include training workshops, equipment provision, recruiting and coordinating volunteers, administrative and operational support, event management and advocacy. The tasks for each hub will not be the same and they will respond to local conditions. The responsiveness to community is a keystone attribute of a community conservation hub.

Key issues identified by Peters (2019) included that many hubs did not have the capacity to provide what they needed to, that is the assistance with 'administration, reporting and sourcing funds'. Peters indicated that the training options available to hub members were strongly focused on on-the-ground skills but were much more limited in skill areas such as 'governance and project and volunteer management'. Peters also identified that funding of hubs was a challenge, and that their success was strongly linked to paid staff: they are 'essential'. Peters' research gave useful insights into how the operation of hubs and hub-like organisations were tracking and provided a list of principles and practices for establishing and sustaining hubs, based on matters raised in interviews. Overall, it was clear that the implementation gap between hub aspirations and reality was potentially very significant.

Feeney and Lees identified a list of things hubs do in support of community conservationists from their analysis of Auckland as follows:

- Training workshops, covering the essentials of trapping, weeds, data collection, ecology, restoration planning, monitoring, health and safety, first aid and the like
- Provision of equipment such as traps, bait, weed bags and pest monitoring tunnels
- Recruiting and coordinating volunteers
- Monitoring and reporting ecological impact of voluntary restoration effort (although this is more a potential service and is not commonly undertaken)
- Administrative and operational support (including facilitation, grant applications, accounting, shelter of a trust and bank account)
- Solving problems, covering gaps and making connections
- Advocacy and championing
- Organising social occasions

While their roles change depending on the community they service, the support for and enablement of community conservation function is at least common. This aligns with our interpretation of the overall objective for community conservation hubs. A standout theme of interviews and observations in practice is that most hubs appear heavily focused on a particular demographic (specifically middle class Pākehā) and genuine engagement with iwi and hapū, and non- Pākehā in general seemed very scant. This aspect of their operation warrants further analysis but is outside the scope and time constraints of this report.

FINDINGS

Community conservation in New Zealand is characterised by scores of disparate groups and individuals working often in complete isolation over the landscapes. Each group or individual is naturally limited in what they can achieve, and there is an opportunity to have far greater impact if resources, time and expertise are pooled and directed towards common objectives. There is a logic and elegance to that concept. The ready uptake of the concept of collectively working together can at least in part be attributed to its rational simplicity and practical benefits such as economies of scale making certain activities and investments easier to do at scale (investment in technology etc.).

Community conservation hubs are therefore the physical manifestation of a sensible desire to work together at a landscape level to enhance the overall impact of many small conservation efforts. What they look like, how they operate and what they can and will achieve will differ based on context. There is strong merit in their existence, and they should be supported providing they achieve the publicly desirable outcomes that they should. The infancy [3] of conservation hubs in New Zealand is important because it might be premature to attempt to prove as many hubs have not yet been adequately established and resourced to reach their potential. It is however, worth noting where challenges have appeared already and ensure that current and future implementation of the concept is mindful of those issues.

It is critical to note however, that the conceptual strength of hubs can sometimes not be realised on the ground. These findings detail the promises and pitfalls of the approach and suggests solutions that might minimise the impact of those on the conservation outcomes at scale. At the heart of the issue is the question – whether, despite hiccups and personality clashes, nature is better off for collaborative approaches because more efficient and effective work can be accomplished collectively than apart. Are we better together?

THE REALITY OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION HUBS

For the purposes of our discussion we have grouped findings into seven categories:

1. Relationships
2. Structure and power
3. Agency and hub interplay
4. Strategy and objectives
5. Hub development
6. Adding value – hub effectiveness
7. Evaluating value-add of hubs

It is important to note that not all hubs consider themselves to be a hub, not all organisations that consider themselves hubs necessarily function as a hub and there are probably more hubs required in some places that have not yet been established, yet in other areas it may be relatively crowded. In addition, the diversity of settings and the range of ways they operate makes generalisations tricky, although a common theme is engaging people and marshalling their efforts towards conservation outcomes.

[3] Fifty percent of the hubs identified in Peters (2019) had been formed in the previous 5 years.

Relationships

Fundamentally, a hub works in an area where several community conservation groups are already active (otherwise it would not exist) and where there is sufficient willing participation by those groups.[4] The relationships that hubs have with each other, the rest of the conservation community, agencies, iwi and hapū and other stakeholders are all relevant when considering the value-add of hubs to conservation outcomes. It was noted that hubs themselves have few opportunities to share ideas and information, and that they may benefit from some form of federalisation.

Experience with relationships of hubs seems decidedly mixed to date. Striking among analysis of community conservation hubs today, is the dearth of discussion about the role of iwi and hapū in community conservation and how iwi and hapū based projects may be best served by hub support. Agencies, particularly councils, appear to be uncertain about how to engage with Māori in this respect, and hubs potentially even more so. This is not true of all of them, but stands as a general observation, suggesting hubs are therefore servicing some demographics more or better over others. This may vary geographically and in accordance with other variables. It is likely that this fact is rooted in the framing of community conservation as a suite of discrete and discretionary tasks, a 'nice to have', rather than a critical role and one that is integrated into day to day life. Thus, effective engagement of iwi and hapū in conservation at a community level may require a quite fundamental reframing of the context.

A common theme of interviews was that community conservation in New Zealand has characteristics that can be hostile to collaboration, with reasons cited including: a strong sense of individual identity, territoriality and patch protection, a competitive and highly constrained funding environment and a lack of strategic context for community conservation (i.e., it is often not clear what needs to be done and what part the community can play in that). All of these are handbrakes on collaboration at a group, hub and regional scale, which has implications for the effectiveness of hubs and their validity as a concept and is likely to demand significant skills to address.

In any collective workspace there is the potential for internal conflict as to strategic direction, for participant groups and individuals to lose identity and their ‘point of difference’ by engaging with a collective organisation of similar groups, and for myriad other practical and strategic problems to stymie outcomes. There is no doubt that training and funding to resource a professional facilitator to help with these crucial steps is essential. This will result in a drive for professionalisation of a sector that is largely voluntary and highly dispersed – but If they are to be charged with such a significant proportion of taking care of nature, that step is likely necessary anyway.

Structure and power

A common issue raised by interviewees relates to the arrangement of the players as being key to functional relationships, and the concept of whether the hub behaved in a ‘top down’ or ‘bottom up’ way was a common topic. This theme is consistently invoked when discussing hubs in some form. It is worth unpacking what those two approaches might look like and recognising that in practice it is usually a combination of the two – the binary is purely illustrative.

A 'top-down' approach in this context might be characterised by the development of hubs being purposeful, centralised, stepwise and orderly, arranged logically on the landscape to 'service' predictably sized communities in predictable ways. The approach of such a context would likely be formulaic (potentially failing to adequately account

[4] Some groups will choose not to participate in being part of a hub and it is unlikely that it would be fair or reasonable to force them to do so. Some groups may perceive limited benefit in the alliance and as such may not deploy resources in developing that relationship.

for local variation), favouring consistency for consistency's sake and being strongly agency driven. By contrast, a bottom up approach would likely be random, organic, democratic, highly diverse and not necessarily aligned with strategic or even public good objectives. It is possible that the use of the binary terms is antagonising, as most participants seemed to see the value of a blend of both approaches.

A description that does not invoke a sense of hierarchy may find more favour. For instance, one participant took umbrage with the use of 'top-down', 'umbrella' and other words that imply control and oversight and expressed a preference for enablement of community conservation hubs to be referred to as 'underpinning', 'backroom help' and a 'cradle' as an alternate structure. There is merit in this recasting of the relationship, based on the testing of the participant's views and in diminishing the binary, reflecting that both approaches have value.

The strategic foundation would provide the links to higher order documents, expend effort on growing the pie and alleviating the administration burden of the main space via the cradle initiative. Groups would be randomly arranged within the geographic area of interest and would have varying degrees of contact with the hub depending on their needs and aspirations. The hub would be charged with measuring the effectiveness of the collective approach (a task that would need to be resourced as much as any other). This description aligns with what appears to be the conceptual aim of hubs, but implementation is highly variable.

Agency and hub interplay

A key strategic relationship for any hub will be with one or more regulatory agencies with statutory duties related to biodiversity management. At a national scale this would be the Department of Conservation, at regional level a regional council or unitary authority and some groups may have a relationship with their city or district council. Such relationships may be multidimensional and cover a wide range of possible subject areas, one of which may be conservation (and there may be subsets of that).

Agencies have a statutory duty to provide leadership in conservation (within scope of their role) and otherwise are key repositories of technical expertise, providing advice and assistance to the community conservation sector. They should avoid the compulsion to be too directive, treating community conservationists as an extension of their operations (albeit unpaid). Respect for their independence and the essence of voluntarism is crucial to functional relationships. In exchange, the community conservation sector must respect the statutory limits of agencies actions and that their resources and time are finite, needing to be deployed strategically.

The interplay of each hub and the relevant agencies is highly variable. There are clear signs the above settings are not necessarily maintained. Some interviewees who worked with hubs or for them were dismissive of agencies, some felt highly vexed and disenfranchised by them and others had strong, functional relationships by their own estimate. Often a relationship is quite different with different parts of an agency – for example, strong and productive with the 'on the ground' parks officer while struggling to gain cooperation from management. A common issue in conservation is how to have the input of volunteers recognised.

Strategy and objectives

Conservation is a science, and a highly technical one. Significant expertise is required in many areas and some tasks would transcend the technical capability of most community conservation organisations (including hubs). The same amount of conservation effort can yield very different outcomes depending on where and how it is expended. How

science-led hubs can be in terms of priorities seems dependent on the difference between what those science-led priorities are and what the community want to do. The technical nature of many aspects of conservation helps to underline the importance of constructive working relationships to achieving good outcomes, particularly ecological.

Community conservation hubs are appropriately driven by the community. At their best they are a coalescing entity at the intersection of efforts by many groups and individuals across a given space. As noted by Peters (2019), their strength is in their independence and their distance from agencies. The freedom of this position has a strategic flipside that is of interest – where hubs are in receipt of public funds for conservation purposes, how sensibly is that money used? Is that funding deployed where it is needed most from a conservation perspective and does it really matter, so long as people are engaged? How science-led are their actions?

A key concern for many commentators is the extent to which hubs align with conservation goals, including whether the efforts of community group's they support is targeted at wider conservation goals rather than a more limited focus. The conservation outcomes of the hubs are of primary interest to this research paper, and therefore this lack of alignment is of note. How funding is deployed, and the public value of the outcomes is critical to the legitimacy of that funding. Independence must be balanced with accountability and transparency.

Improving focus of community conservation on science priorities may require science communication, the development of tools the community can access to assist in their conservation undertakings (e.g., Auckland's ecological restoration monitoring toolkit) and boosted presence of technical assistance in the community to provide advice. People are however uniquely wedded to place and any initiative to provide conservation assistance must be mindful of this. Funding agencies have the strongest prospect of driving alignment with science-led priorities, a fact that is also likely to be strategically desirable for them (i.e. all funders want to 'make a difference', and in conservation, where and how you choose to deploy resources determines much of the magnitude of impact that you will make).

Hub development

Hubs are very unevenly distributed and their path to establishment highly variable. Several have arisen from established organisations moving to undertake a hub role (e.g., Kaipatiki Project, Tasman Environment Trust), while others are established as hubs from the beginning in recognition of a gap in their context (e.g., Bay Conservation Alliance, Pūkaha to Palliser).

Funding is a critical issue for the success of hubs. Hubs usually although not always have paid staff. This would, based on opinion and experience, be a critical factor which enables them to achieve the multiplier effect. A volunteer-only hub is likely to face similar limitations to the groups it supports. Sustaining staff means an ongoing need for income however, and very often hubs are pitted against the groups they support in the same funding environment. This is not a fault of either hubs or member groups, but a function of the small space that all these entities must work in in New Zealand. The oft-held goal of being 'self-sustaining' is enormously challenging and for most conservation organisations is not feasible (Brown 2018). Internationally, UK Wildlife Trusts[5] provide a useful contrast for the perpetual funding struggles faced here, underlining the paradox of an imperative to collaborate in an environment that is inherently competitive.

[5] UK Wildlife Trusts are a nationwide collective based in the United Kingdom that support on the ground initiatives, preventing groups from having to formalise as quickly as they do in New Zealand and shouldering much of the administrative burden. They run a membership-based model which New Zealand's Bay Conservation Alliance emulates, among others, and are also a wealthy long-term landowner due to historic purchases and gifting.

One interviewee raised several pertinent questions – if hubs are to enable conservation to be upscaled through building capacity and capability, is there a natural limit to their life? Will there be a point where each current and future hub reaches the end of their useful existence? Or will a hub of some description always be required to unify disparate operators and provide guidance and support? These questions are important and will continue to be worth pondering.

Based on the above learnings, it would seem that from a funder point of view, bespoke funds that target the different activities of hubs over other conservation groups may help to limit competition (but does not change the fact that the pot is too small). Also relevant is whether hubs are needed where they are currently established. A proliferation of hubs across the landscape is a potential outcome of additional funding streams becoming available. It will be vital for funders to critically evaluate the outcomes of the collective model and to ensure their funding includes provision encourage hubs to be created where they are most needed and avoid inadvertently supporting the establishment of hubs in inappropriate locations.

Adding value – hub effectiveness

The value-add of a hub lies in its ability to support and enable community conservation effort to be more effective and generate greater conservation gains than would otherwise be achieved. Interviewees were relatively consistent in noting that if a hub is not doing the above, it is not doing its job. How this is carried out depends on the needs of the relevant organisations, as well as the way parties are engaged and what the 'membership model' is (see for example, the membership model of the Bay Conservation Alliance – Box 1).

Box 1: Bay Conservation Alliance

The Bay Conservation Alliance formed in 2017, using seed funding from the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, Tauranga Electricity Community Trust, Baytrust and WWF. The Alliance runs a membership model, meaning groups pay a small annual membership fee ($100) to access the support for their project that the Alliance can provide. Groups sign a membership agreement with the Alliance, an organisation that has taken inspiration from the UK Wildlife Trusts model (despite a very different context).

At present the Alliance supports 12 member groups, with a near-term goal of 15 and working towards more and greater landscape scale projects. The Alliance provides backroom support, advising groups on financial management, pest control methods workshops and assistance with toxin applications among many other things. Key constraints on upscaling is the availability of funding to employ staff with sufficient expertise.

Funding of hubs to date has often not been linked to successful outcomes or demonstrated hub effectiveness. There are several reasons for this, including that:

- Some entities being funded as hubs aren't really functioning in a way that enables genuine upscale in conservation activity due to limited capacity and capability or alternate focus areas

Limited ability to demonstrate success or 'value-add'

- Some groups are more effective at telling their story than others, meaning true demonstrations of success are skewed
- Agencies and other funders have the perception that another organisation is already doing what a hub is proposing where they are not
- There is limited outcome or benefit monitoring of funding, so It is 'blind allocation'

Lack of additional conservation outcomes

- Activities being funded are business as usual and not truly additional so result in limited new benefit

Limitations of resourcing and funding models

- Hubs have insufficient resources to do the job that is expected of them, sometimes spending all their time securing further funding with limited time to generate outcomes.
- Funding is subject to arbitrary time limitations meaning it is more likely to go to new groups regardless of demonstrable success

It is important that funding follows function, and that the tasks a hub is setting out to do and how successful they are at doing it is the key driver for funding. Ensuring that the added value manifests will be particularly pertinent for established hubs that exist for broader purposes than just conservation support. For these 'mixed-purpose' hubs, there is significant risk of funding 'business as usual' (BAU) in certain scenarios. On the other hand, an existing organisation brings already established relationships, credibility, administrative infrastructure and a track record to demonstrate to funders, something fledgling purpose-built hubs struggle with. The uncertainty can only be addressed by monitoring and capturing what we care about in doing so.

The origins and objectives differ between hubs, meaning generalisations about them are elusive. Most of them do have paid staff and operate in themselves as a trust or other legal entity. Feeney and Lees (2019) identified the following factors that hubs saw as being valuable to their own success:

- Being strategic and well organised
- Connected to peers and partners e.g., other Hubs, local businesses or groups with goals in common
- Having a landscape-scale perspective and plan
- Having the right skills to support 'hands-on action' people
- Ability to navigate Council
- Financial stability (although not explicitly addressed via their report)

Our research accords with these findings and brings the importance of strategic skills into sharp focus. The fundamental desire for community conservation hubs across the board is that they must enable additional conservation outcomes from enabling and supporting collective action.

Evaluating value-add of hubs

For any conservation initiative that is funded (particularly by public funding) it is important to have a degree of auditability – otherwise you're just 'hoping for the best'. Previous research has demonstrated that the conservation outcomes of community conservation are not always apparent – either because they do not exist or are not tracked – meaning it can be difficult to establish a baseline to measure the additional value of a hub. Hubs also have a key role to play in coordinating monitoring of the groups they support, and an example of one that does this is set out in Box 2.

Box 2: Kiwi Coast

Kiwi Coast is a community-led collaborative initiative based in Northland providing support to more than 145 community groups, iwi, hapū, schools, organisations and landowners across the region. Operating since 2013, Kiwi Coast brings these entities together with the collective vision of helping Northland's wild kiwi population to thrive and roam in safety. Groups can contribute to this vision while retaining their own identity and individual goals.

By building a strong regional network, Kiwi Coast has been able to illustrate collective impact and maximise ecological gains. Groups are encouraged to share data and participate in region-wide monitoring activities, such as the annual collation of trap catch data, which is then analysed by Kiwi Coast, and fed back to the collective as well as funders and other stakeholders. Groups retain their autonomy and are supported to the extent they need. Support and assistance are tailored to each group and their specific obstacles.

Kiwi Coast provides a platform of support and has established a strong partnership with Northland Regional Council. Four locally based Kiwi Coast Coordinators assist groups with skill building workshops, start-up funds, resourcing, monitoring assistance, trapper mentoring, communications and advocacy support. The effectiveness of this model is partly attributed to having a simple and elegant aim, multifarious approaches to achieving that aim and a highly charismatic species at the centre. Not all groups or hubs have this.

Many monitoring tasks exceed the capacity and capability of groups however, and where the hub coordinates or carries out monitoring, the added value can lie at least partially in guiding the demonstration of outcomes. Funding to measure outcomes is notoriously hard to come by, and this may require a culture shift with funders and philanthropists. We cannot manage what we do not monitor, and we must expect more and better effectiveness monitoring and assessment in order to validate assumptions and evaluate the way we support community conservation in general, and hubs specifically.

It is perhaps useful to consider constructing a definition that is outcome-oriented and does not focus strongly on heavily prescriptive methods (owing to the need for hubs to respond to their communities of interest). Requiring systematic outcome monitoring has an associated cost which is sometimes significant, and groups and hubs will need to be resourced to measure and monitor their collective impact.

UPSCALING COLLABORATION IN NEW ZEALAND COMMUNITY CONSERVATION – FUTURE TRENDS

Hubs are likely to be their most valuable when they can assist in bridging between high-level multi-party goals and practical implementation by groups and individuals on the ground. Operating at a regional scale is key to directing community efforts in a strategic way. There is a current trend of hubs playing a strategic role in cross-agency strategy at a regional or multi-regional scale. Key examples of this are the establishment of the Waikato Collective Action Biodiversity Project (see Box 3) and the development of the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Strategy[6] by an alliance of agencies, iwi and other organisations (including the Tasman Environment Trust). These examples illustrate that while hubs may function in a supporting/'cradling' role for their affiliates, there is potentially also a crucial role for them as advocates and representatives of the sector in multi-agency strategic conservation planning.

[6] The Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Strategy is a document reflecting a top of the south alliance between a range of agencies and other stakeholders, including the Tasman Environment Trust. The document sets high level conservation goals, but implementation is devolved to the partners at this time.

The increasing occurrence of hubs taking a strategic role in regional biodiversity strategies has manifested alongside a slow burning trend for regional councils to take the lead in, particularly non-regulatory, biodiversity management (Willis 2018). Such a trend has been highlighted for many years as a logical step, as the regional scale is so crucial from a conservation perspective. It is possible that this is the next step in the 'natural evolution' of community conservation, making hubs less important (see for example the fledgling Waikato Collective Impact project – Box 3). Whatever the case, it gives community conservation a seat at the table at eye level with the usual entities (councils and DOC) and provides opportunities for hubs to contribute in a strategic manner. A focus on regionally derived approaches does not imply that DOC and national efforts are not critical, but where community engagement is a key factor as in the development of hubs, the regional scale is generally more appropriate and effective for locally focused groups.

Box 3: Collective Impact in the Waikato

An initiative between the Waikato Regional Council, the Department of Conservation and Trust Waikato (a funding body) is attempting to take a different and more holistic approach to a collective conservation effort. The change in approach is in recognition of current models of working across community and agency conservation not achieving transformational outcomes. The opportunity the project wishes to address is to 'make best use of the funding and resources that have been secured through the joint WRC/DOC 'Restoring Nature, Connecting Communities' proposal to design a Collective Impact initiative and a backbone resource function that will support collaborative delivery and maximise biodiversity impact in Waikato' (Martin Jenkins, 2019).

The approach seeks to broker a common agenda and shared vision and a shared system of measurement and evaluation. Philosophically, the stakeholders agree to carry out 'mutually reinforcing activities'. These distinguish the approach from collaboration because it is not just about what parties do when they are together, but also what they do when they are apart, supported by a continuous communication programme.

The proposal is to put in place 'backbone support' funded to operate for at least 1-2 years – this is often missing from other efforts to align activities. The key functions for this backbone entity are:

- Guide vision and strategy
- Support aligned activities
- Establish shared measurement practices
- Cultivate community engagement and ownership
- Advance policy
- Mobilise resources

The project proposes to have three staff members with distinct roles: the Collective Impact Project Director, the Data Manager and one or more Activator(s). The next steps for the project are to engage with iwi and to design a process for collaborative decision-making.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that the concept of the community conservation hub is here to stay, but it would benefit from a more tightly defined status. Fundamentally, hubs can act to catalyse landscape scale conservation initiatives in a variety of ways, responding to the needs and aspirations of their communities. If one size fit all, then a national organisation could do it all. Taking a more holistic and multi-scale approach, it would seem clear that collective approaches to conservation have much to offer. Equally clear, is that the reality of implementing collective models has been fraught in some parts of the country and the murkiness of the definition of hubs and their role has not helped. More clarity is needed.

At such a nascent stage of development however, it is potentially risky to attempt to be overly zealous in attempting a tight definition for what constitutes a hub. It may be more useful to maintain focus on the over-arching concept of conservation hubs and monitoring and validating that concept, learning from real world implementation. Focus should be on what hubs should do, and the additionality they bring to the overall conservation picture. It is perhaps useful to consider constructing a definition that is outcome-oriented and does not focus strongly on the means (owing to the need for hubs to respond to their communities of interest).

What does this mean?

This section summarises what different stakeholders should be mindful of as community conservation hubs develop, to ensure that their purpose of upscaling conservation outcomes is more likely to be achieved. There is certainly no recipe for hubs, the key thing is that they are effective in engaging existing and future community conservationists and maximising the value of the collective.

If community conservation hubs are going to significantly contribute to upscaling conservation outcomes, they should focus on whether the community is receptive to the concept and prepared to help drive it, engaging a broad range of people from different backgrounds. They should ensure they identify their capacity and capability and seek to improve it wherever needed to ensure they have the relevant skills to meet the needs of their communities. Hubs should take care to maintain their independence from agencies, whilst adopting best practice methods and maintaining functional relationships with these agencies. It is highly likely that a centralised support base for regional or sub-regional hubs at a national level would assist in multiplying efforts.

If agencies and philanthropists are going to invest public conservation funding in hubs, they should ensure that funding terms and conditions reflect the nature of conservation (long term, sustained funding with adequate provision for the significant cost of output and outcome monitoring that is expected in reporting requirements). As far as possible, supporting agencies should limit the prospect of hub funding competing with on-the-ground conservation, and funding should be dispensed based on demonstrable success. Monitoring conservation outcomes is inherently expensive, and care must be taken to ensure data collected is fit for purpose and appropriately analysed.

If community groups are going to participate in or form a collective hub, they should consider the extent to which a hub approach enables their efforts to be multiplied and what model and mode of management might be most effective. They should also consider the capacity and capability of hubs and whether they are able to provide an appropriate voice for the member groups they support and in what forum/fora. There is much to gain from being supported by a functional hub, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Reduces need to formalise early by operating within an existing collective
- Reduces duplication of administration tasks and streamlines processes
- Provides consistent advice and support on how to undertake key tasks (i.e., compliance requirements)
- Provides administrative infrastructure for groups that reduce Individual group costs (e.g., bank accounts)

Potential hub participants should be mindful of risks however, including potential loss of identity for groups within a collective or potential difficulty in gaining agreement as to strategic direction. Potential participants must also be prepared to operate in a funding environment that is still competitive, often pitting the collective against the individual or group.

Strategic findings

Key strategic findings on community conservation hubs are as summarised here and detailed below:

- Hubs must be the bridge between strategy and practice ('translators')
- Diversity in engagement needed to bring communities along
- Funding must follow function
- Evaluating value add of hubs critical
- A central support body at a national scale would assist and improve outcomes

Hubs must be the bridge between strategy and practice ('translators')

Hubs have the potential to be the key conduit between strategic conservation approaches and communities on the ground. Their skills, knowledge and networks can help establish and sustain community drivers towards high-level goals. Conservation is highly technical and communication by agencies can appear to lack awareness of this. Hubs have the potential to be key translators. They can also play the role of being the voice of their participants, allowing scattered voices to be heard more than if they were disparate groups that agencies struggle to keep track off. Adoption of the 'cradle' concept would ensure that hubs did not continuously overrule their participants and participants should generally feel welcome and empowered.

Diversity in engagement needed to bring communities along

Bespoke approaches for iwi and hapū-led conservation appear lacking and knowledge is non-integrated with wider community conservation hub endeavours. It is probably that community conservation hubs as currently operating (in general) are targeted at middle class Pākehā/Western participation in conservation and may thus struggle to fully engage with our multicultural communities. Hubs are unlikely to succeed if they do not respond to the broad needs of their communities and may also struggle to gain buy-in if they are seen as one-dimensional. In addition, funders do and will increasingly expect to understand how an organisation such as a hub is implementing the Treaty of Waitangi and integrating mātauranga Māori into their operations.

Funding must follow function – need and success

Funding for successful hub ventures is fraught due to weak definitions, nascent processes and weak monitoring and evaluation. Hubs are inherently community driven and must remain so. They may arise and disappear spontaneously, have different stages of development and may give different levels of focus to different aspects of their role depending on resources and other factors. Therefore, at a strategic level the sole means of driving better outcomes through hubs is to be very much more discerning in funding allocation.

Evaluating value add of hubs is critical

Robust monitoring and reporting are essential to ensure funding is achieving purported ecological outcomes. While monitoring on outputs is common, it is very difficult to understand from most monitoring the extent to which the 'hub' has contributed to improved conservation outcomes. Funding programmes must become more sophisticated and capture this. This is likely to demand the development of clear indicators for success and mandated reporting against them at multiple levels, in addition to explicitly tagging resources to measuring and monitoring.

A central support body at a national scale would assist and improve outcomes

Many regional and sub-regional hubs do similar tasks, even if their approach differs. Certain tasks are related to nationally consistent processes such as Charities Commission compliance, health and safety, science best practice and other matters. Hubs also have no clear means of interacting with other hubs or sharing knowledge – the very same things they facilitate for the groups and individuals they support. National institutional recognition of hubs and of community conservation more generally would likely be immensely valuable.

REFERENCES

Brown MA, Stephens RT, Peart R, Fedder B 2015. Vanishing nature: Facing New Zealand's biodiversity crisis, Auckland, New Zealand: Environmental Defence Society.

Department of Conservation 2019. Te Koiroa o te Koiora: A discussion document on proposals for a biodiversity strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand. Accessed 19 March 2019 from https://img.scoop.co.nz/media/pdfs/1908/biodiversitydiscussiondocument.pdf.

Feeney, Clare and Lees, Anette (2019) Pest Free Auckland: Enhancing conservation knowledge and capability. A strategy, implementation and evaluation plan. A report prepared for the Auckland Council. 30 June 2019.

Jones C, Kirk N 2018. Shared visions: Can community conservation projects' outcomes inform on their likely contributions to national biodiversity goals? New Zealand Journal of Ecology (in press).

Kiwi Coast 2018. First Five Years Report 2013 – 2018. Kiwi Coast Trust. Accessed 19 March 2020 from https://kiwicoast.org.nz/kiwi-coast-the-first-five-years/.

Martin Jenkins 2019. Supporting collective impact for biodiversity in the Waikato: Considerations for a backbone support function. Final Report prepared for Waikato Regional Council.

Ministry for the Environment 2019. Draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity. Accessed 19 March 2020 from https://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/biodiversity/draft-national-policy-statement-indigenous-biodiversity.

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) 2017. Taonga of an island nation: Saving New Zealand's birds. Accessed 19 March 2020 from http://www.pce.parliament.nz/media/1695/taonga-of-an-island-nation-web-final-small.pdf.

Peters M 2019. Understanding the context of conservation community hubs. Report prepared for Department of Conservation. Waikato, New Zealand: people+science Ltd.

Rykers E 2019. Community Conservation: The Solution to the Biodiversity Crisis? The Dig. Accessed 19 March 2020 from https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1909/S00096/ellen-rykers-community-conservation-and-biodiversity.htm.

Willis G 2017, Addressing New Zealand's biodiversity challenge. A regional council think-piece on the future of biodiversity management in New Zealand. Auckland, New Zealand: Enfocus.

APPENDIX 1

The following people were Interviewed in January and February 2020.

Monica Peters	people + science
Brett Butland	Auckland Council
Rebecca Bell	PFNZ Trust
Ngaire Sullivan	Kiwi Coast
Karen Schumacher	East Taranaki Environment Trust - Purangi Kiwi Project
Steve Ellis	Taranaki Regional Council
Sky Davies	Tasman Environmental Trust
Bruce Clarkson	University of Waikato
Patrick Whaley	Waikato Regional Council
Michelle Elborn	Bay Conservation Alliance
Alistair Bisley	Pukaha to Palliser
Dai Morgan	Northtec/Parihaka Community Landcare
Dennis Turton	Trust Waikato

THECATALYSTGROUP

planning and environment

p. +64 6 358 6300

e. enquiries@thecatalystgroup.co.nz

a. Level 3, 31 George Street,

PO Box 362, Palmerston North

www.thecatalystgroup.co.nz