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RESEARCH REPORT

Transforming community conservation funding in New Zealand



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Foreword

The Predator Free New Zealand movement is sweeping the country as people realise our generation may be the last to have a shot at saving the bird species we love before they're exterminated by invasive predators.

Everyone has a role in this movement. Whether they belong to a community conservation group or an NGO like Forest & Bird; a school group, a marae or a farm or whether they're simply a family catching the rat in the compost bin, communities and individuals are the unsung heroes of this campaign.

Department of Conservation and other big government agencies openly concede this ambitious task is beyond them alone and they must rely on the support of communities. However, how we best enable communities to be most effective and maintain their enthusiasm, without over burdening them, is unclear.

The Predator Free NZ Trust (PFNZ), a private charitable organisation, was established with the help of DOC in 2013 to encourage, support and connect people and community groups all over New Zealand in their efforts to suppress and ultimately eradicate mammalian predators such as wild cats, rats, possums, stoats and other mustelids.

Community conservation has been growing in the last decade. The reasons for involvement vary far beyond the goals and prioritisation of government. With increasing reliance on community conservation to achieve national goals we need to ensure the right support mechanisms and funding streams are in place to achieve best practice and the outcomes we all seek.

In 2017, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr Jan Wright, released a report titled 'Taonga of an island nation: Saving New Zealand's birds' which looked at the desperate state of New Zealand's native birds, the challenges they face, and what it might take to restore them in large numbers back on to the mainland. The report further confirmed the concerns of the PFNZ Trust that community conservation in New Zealand requires more support and coordination.

It is significant that the independent commissioner appreciated the importance of community-based conservation not only for its contribution to national conservation but also as an important social construct in our society.

Shortly after the release of the PCE report, the PFNZ Trust decided to further explore the funding environment for community conservation and convened a workshop of a number of the principal funders including agencies, local government and community groups to distill their experiences. The workshop confirmed a lack of dialogue and alignment, unrealistic expectations and a good deal of frustration.

Appreciating the potential of a far more effective movement if these barriers could be removed, PFNZ Trust commissioned leading conservation writer and researcher Dr Marie Brown from The Catalyst Group to complete an evidence-based analysis of the issues and present some recommendations for a way forward.

The report and its recommendations are offered to the conservation community at large in the hope that urgent progress will be made to remove barriers and sharpen focus, and ensure community groups are empowered to do the work they want to do with the necessary support structures behind them.

Sir Rob Fenwick

Chairman PFNZ Trust

Executive summary and recommendations

Community conservation, including the efforts of landowners, is a burgeoning source of inspiration and energy in the very urgent fight to address environmental decline in New Zealand. For decades the labours of grass-roots initiatives from the very small to the highly professionalised have been a crucial tool in the toolbox of public engagement in nature through planting, pest control, education, advocacy and other initiatives. Such endeavours have costs, and the purpose of this report was to analyse the state of community conservation resourcing and to provide insight and direction into how the context could be improved.

New Zealand faces a dawning biodiversity crisis, brought about by the heavy hand of human colonisation which resulted in widespread habitat loss and plagues of mammalian predators that have imperilled a significant proportion of our species and ecosystems. Conservation is the work of addressing these declines, curtailing them and – hopefully – turning the trends upward in favour of our natural heritage. In this complex space, central government agencies such as DOC and councils, private landowners, corporate partners, philanthropic entities and community groups all play an important role. But the context is at best opaque.

The struggle for community conservation to find adequate resources is well-noted and of deep concern. The gumption and energy of grass roots initiatives can dissipate in the face of repeat rejections for resources and assistance. Public agencies, philanthropists and corporate entities hold the purse strings and determine what is funded and when and how. But this is largely carried out in the absence of a coherent strategy for how the often-disparate players can work together and to what end. This report argues for a restoration of cohesive leadership for conservation and a more robust strategic context that assigns community efforts a clear and complementary place, alongside state-delivered core conservation efforts.

Because, of course, community conservation is not the same as agency-led conservation – it usually lacks the scale, expertise and financial backing to undertake transformative conservation alone. This renders it by necessity a complement to agency-led efforts, and this report offers solutions and recommendations with that in mind. More support and more efficient funding models are needed to resource community conservation, most particularly where activities align with high level objectives. But with that resourcing must come a heightened expectation for best practice methods to be followed, outcomes to be tracked and funding to be more tightly linked to conservation priorities.

This report makes the following key recommendations.

Establish a national and regionally-linked institution that will provide visibility, strategic advice and practical support to community conservationists including landowners.

Develop a national strategic conservation plan to coalesce and prioritise conservation effort across all players and places.

Align public funding of conservation activities with conservation need, to maximise the difference made by that investment.

Enhance the funding system by reorienting allocation and distribution to focus more stringently on outcomes and streamline processes to reduce transaction costs while enhancing accountability for outcomes.

In the absence of clear leadership and an unambiguous place being made for community conservation initiatives at a strategic level, the opaque operation and outcomes of the sector will remain concerning. A clear strategy would enable resources to be apportioned appropriately and would orient conservation overall to a far more outcomes-based approach.

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Part I Overview

Community conservation is a burgeoning sector in New Zealand, having gained ground since environmental campaigns such as Manapouri in the 1960s through to the present day in which multitudes of groups and landowners toil nationwide to plant, trap and weed their way to a better environmental future. Community conservation plays an important role in engaging people in the plight of biodiversity, sustainability and other pressing environmental matters. It is also an important tool in the toolbox in the fight to turn around New Zealand's dim record of biodiversity loss.

The Predator Free Movement has come to the fore in recent years, spreading nationwide through communities and agencies, gathering momentum towards Sir Paul Callaghan's 'big audacious goal' of a Predator Free New Zealand. Central to the growing energy is the Predator Free New Zealand Trust. The Trust was formed in 2013 and is governed by a multidisciplinary board. The purpose of the Trust is threefold:

- Grow the vision and tell the story of a Predator Free NZ
- Support and grow the national army of volunteers
- Connect community groups, private landowners, hapū and iwi

The Trust's energy and effort have demonstrated the value of supporting communities to engage with nature and the value of an organisation providing some cohesive oversight.

There is little doubt that the energy of communities for conservation is a force to be reckoned with, particularly from a social perspective. However, there are also clear signals that the sector may be straining under the weight of the rising expectations and the ever-present struggle to fund efforts. Conservation is inordinately hard and demands sustained and intensive effort from long running organisations and institutions. Community conservation is more likely to be limited in resources, struggling to maintain volunteer numbers, lacking in technical expertise and having difficulty in finding time and energy to undertake administration, monitoring and evaluation.

In 2017 the outgoing Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment published a report called 'Taonga of an island nation', highlighting the difficulty of community conservation to resource its efforts. The PCE's report attracted significant national attention, shining a spotlight on a range of issues including the ability of community conservation to carry out its work and what support it might need going forward. This report builds on that publication. The purpose of this research was to analyse the state of community conservation funding and develop recommendations for improvement.

Key questions

In conducting this research, the following questions were asked:

1. What is the current state of conservation resourcing for community groups and private landowners, with respect to amount, distribution and outcomes – identify issues and innovations?
2. What are the key issues facing the sector in terms of resourcing, its distribution and outcomes achieved, and do different stakeholders perceive them differently?
3. What are the ways the structure and operation of community conservation could be improved to enhance the value proposition for investment?
4. What are the key levers to improve the state of conservation resourcing for community groups and landowners?

Methodology

Three key sources of information were drawn on for this research. A literature review, a survey of community groups and landowners and a series of key informant interviews. The three sources helped to unravel many key issues facing community conservation and identify their drivers and possible solutions. The literature review was instructive but did reveal that there are some gaps in the literature that could be filled by further research. Literature from the 1980's and 1990's also contains many prescient passages that identified the issues canvassed in this report. It is hoped that with a more strategic view and the benefit of many more years of 'doing' community conservation that issues can be highlighted and then more purposely resolved.

Survey

In November 2017, Predator Free New Zealand coordinated an online survey of community groups and landowners nationwide, about funding. The purpose of this survey was to source the community conservation sectors views and experiences of finding resources to carry out their activities. The driver was to better understand the issues related to the funding of community conservation from government, corporate and philanthropic sources, given concerns raised formally and informally about access to resources.

The resourcing of the sector has important implications for its effectiveness and sustainability over the long term which, in turn, has direct and indirect implications for New Zealand's biodiversity. The responses to the survey were anonymous, although group names were requested to avoid duplication. Like all

surveys, the benefit of hindsight provided some ideas on how the questions might have been improved and this is set out in the appendix along with the exact wording of each question.

Key informant interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to ascertain the views on community conservation funding from not just members of community groups or landowners carrying out conservation, but from others including iwi leaders, academics, scientists, business leaders and others. Of importance is not simply how the staff and volunteers carry out their activities, but how — in carrying out those activities — the sector interacts with other agencies, contributes to society's goals and produces social, economic and environmental benefits.

To further understand the role and importance of community conservation, key experts were interviewed over the phone or on a video-call (Skype) following a semi-structured, conversational format. The identity of the key informants has not been disclosed, nor are responses statistically analysed or individually presented. The reason for this anonymity is the same as for the survey – it seemed more important to encourage free and frank answers than to be able to trace responses to individuals.

Part II Background to community conservation

Key messages

- The need for conservation is pressing, poorly understood and requires integrated effort
- Community conservation is not a substitute for coordinated government effort
- No coherent national strategic plan for conservation is available that expressly recognises the role of community conservation
- In the absence of clarity over strategy and roles, the allocation of resources is challenging and inevitably flawed.

For the purpose of this report, community conservation is defined as ‘conservation activities primarily planned, led and executed by volunteers (including landowners)’. Paid staff may be part of community conservation initiatives and partnerships with agencies (e.g. Department of Conservation) are also common (after Peters et al 2015). The key aspect is that the initiatives are *community-led*. Community conservation comprises conservation projects led by persons or entities other than publicly funded government organisations. In New Zealand these include landowner-led projects, projects administered by community not for profit organisations and iwi-led conservation endeavours.¹ It does not include projects that are led by a government agency but reliant on volunteer labour. Community conservation in New Zealand covers an enormous array of activities and the sector is extraordinarily hard to characterise in any detail. As such, the view taken is a strategic one based on an appreciation of the state of our biodiversity and what it will take to change the trajectory.

Community led conservation initiatives are common right across the world. The context for conservation led by the community varies considerably depending on societal structure and institutional arrangements. Murphree (2002) argued that community conservation came about as a reaction to assumptions that conservation was the state’s role and that the state was perceived to be failing in the task, including by excluding communities from ‘fortress conservation’ (Murphree, 2002).

While there is doubtless a crucial role for community conservation, most particularly the social outcomes associated with engaging people with nature, it appears that the swing potentially went too far, railing against state intervention in favour of grass-roots efforts alone. Barrett noted² ‘*The current fashion for community-based natural resource management overemphasizes the place of local communities in tropical conservation efforts, much as the previous top-down model underemphasized [it]*’ (Barrett et al,

¹ Iwi led conservation projects are rarely confined to environmental matters, as identified in Hungerford 2017. Iwi typically take a broad view of the environment, in which conservation may be only one part of an overall programme

² Barrett’s comments related to tropical ecosystem conservation, but this point is applicable to all biomes

2001 p.497). Taking a more moderate view, it is fair to declare that conservation requires management at multiple levels, a 'pluralistic' approach, necessitating the involvement of communities and government in different ways (Berkes, 2007).

Internationally, rising public expectations of protected area management, controls on development projects, and threatened species recovery are all driving an increased desire for conservation investment (Dolesh, 2012). However, parallel to these rising expectations is often declining public budgets. This situation is mirrored in New Zealand, such as in the ongoing cuts to the funding for the Department of Conservation. The funding for DOC has declined in real terms for nearly a decade (along with other factors such as scientific capacity and capability) and has always been significantly short of what is needed, leading to substantial pressure falling elsewhere to safeguard nature.

An example of a transfer of responsibility was DOC's 'partnership' approach, which came about via a significant restructure in 2012. The partnership approach was based on the notion that DOC could act as a broker for inducing private sector support of conservation to help share the load. There is nothing at all to criticise about partnerships conceptually: aggregating effort towards a common goal makes good management sense (see discussion in Brown et al, 2015). However there has been much speculation and analysis as to whether this drive for private sector funding was borne of genuine strategy or desperate necessity and whether its roll-out put conservation objectives at the fore.

The backpedal in government funding of conservation – particularly, but not confined to, the last three terms of government (the Fifth National Government)– has also resulted in greater expectations of delivery falling upon the unpaid sectors of the community. In many ways, community conservation has galvanised to meet some of the challenges thrown their way. Many conservation groups and landowners have invested significant time into their endeavours and made improvements to all facets of their operations through professionalisation and strategic management. The growing involvement of philanthropy and corporates in the conservation space has provided mentoring, advice, scale and support beyond what would be present if only public agencies were in the picture. The energy and innovation present in the sector is indicative of positive social change in favour of environmental protection and prudent resource use.

But community conservation cannot walk alone.

Biodiversity conservation is a commons problem. It is important for humanity at a global scale and has critical local functions in supporting livelihoods. Voluntary efforts for conservation can supplement and support the outcomes achievable with often meagre appropriations for publicly funded conservation, by assisting with core tasks or carrying out activities that agencies otherwise cannot afford to do. However, declining budgets and ever-increasing workloads for our conservation agencies have meant community conservation, including the efforts of private landowners and others must work within a complex context and often grapple with very urgent and technically demanding tasks. But projects and people dotted

about the landscape haphazardly, with different capacity and capability and not coherently linked is simply unable to provide the oversight required to meet high level conservation goals: that is properly the domain of government. We must recharge our core.

Conservation's resource shortfall

The state of the world's ecosystems and species demands an urgent, concerted and well-resourced effort. However, the money simply is not there now, either in New Zealand or overseas. Globally, there is a monumental shortfall in funding for conservation generally. For instance, the World Resources Institute estimates that the cost of necessary conservation and restoration activities annually is US\$341 billion, and that existing funding leaves \$300 billion in work not done (Credit Suisse and McKinsey, 2016).

This shortfall is crucial context – there is simply not enough money to do what needs to be done. And certainly not from government alone. This shortfall has real and daily implications for the fate of the world's species and ecosystems and for sustaining critical resources and ecosystem services (Waldron et al, 2013). It is the single greatest barrier to effective conservation.

In New Zealand the shortfall is severe. Several strategies to raise significantly more funding for conservation endeavour have been proposed in recent years, including;

1. Imposition of a tourism tax to leverage more conservation funding from the influx of visitors as proposed by several authors including the PCE, the Environmental Defence Society and the Morgan Foundation.
2. Development of novel tax approaches such as an environmental consumption tax and rebate system, that would raise significantly more money and act to disincentivise environmental harm (e.g. the environmental consumption tax and rebate system proposed in Brown et al 2015 and more specifically outlined in Stephens et al, 2016)
3. Increase in Vote Conservation by allocating a greater proportion of existing government funds in recognition of the public value of conservation.

Solutions, that seek to both reduce incentives to harm in the first place and raise vastly more funding for fresh and historic restoration are likely to be the most effective.

The answer to effective conservation is surely a model that both engages communities and musters the collective power of the state. Berkes argued for a nuanced and pluralistic approach that provides space for conservation at all levels and scales. *'The panacea of community-based conservation is probably no more effective than the panacea of exclusively state-based conservation, because they both ignore the multilevel nature of linkages and multiple partners required for any biodiversity conservation project to be successful'* (Berkes, 2007). All these themes are relevant to the New Zealand context; one in which the

biota is in serious trouble and rallying as many people as possible to assist has never been more vital. It should also be noted that environmentally-degrading institutional practice must be countered if any conservation including that driven by the community is to achieve its aims.³

The state of the environment

Isolated for millions of years, New Zealand evolved a biota quite unlike anywhere else and inordinately vulnerable to mammalian predators. Because of this and other pressures (e.g. habitat loss, invasive plant species, climate change) New Zealand is in the grip of a biodiversity crisis (Brown et al, 2015), with wholesale decline across almost all environmental indicators and only isolated areas of improvement (usually following substantial and costly investment of effort and resources). Data in New Zealand's first national environmental report in more than a decade demonstrated that this loss is continuing, with more than 10,000 hectares of indigenous habitat being lost between 1996 and 2012 and, while more than 7% of species had their threat level increase, only a little over 1% recovered somewhat in the same period. (MfE and StatsNZ, 2015). In other words, we are not doing nearly enough conservation to counter the damage and decline (historic and current).

The state of our species and ecosystems are an important driver for the burgeoning interest in community conservation. But conservation is a technical endeavour. Lethal and sublethal trapping techniques, the use of poisons, the translocation or management of highly endangered wildlife, restoration techniques and wildlife monitoring all demand significant skillsets usually not found in community-led initiatives. Thus, the risk of devolution is real. Further, the future of conservation in New Zealand is likely largely in landscape scale projects designed to maximise the difference made for the money invested (Innes & Byrom, 2012). This scale differs from the one at which community conservation typically operates. This mismatch between the aspirations for and capability of community conservation begs recognition.

The players – where does responsibility for conservation rest?

In New Zealand, conservation is a responsibility conferred in statute to both the Department of Conservation and (mainly) regional councils. City and district councils have an important role in managing the use and development of land, including significant vegetation and habitats of significant indigenous fauna. There is a wider responsibility on individuals in addition to that of the state that may or may not be reflected in statute (e.g. the general duty of everyone to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on

³ Support for conservation by government includes not only the work programmes of agencies with specific conservation mandates, but also a more holistic approach that sees other government agencies not working at cross-purposes with the wider conservation agenda. Conservation and development are inextricably linked – a key role of government is to manage the impacts of development on the environment, thus reducing the need for conservation and other recovery efforts at a local scale.

the environment, pursuant to section 17 of the RMA). Government responsibilities also extend to managing the impacts on the environment from human activities ('development').

Māori are the Crown's Treaty partners and a vital component of the fight to save our biodiversity from decline and extinction. The place of Māori in community conservation is, however, unclear and this relationship must be strengthened. It would seem that Māori are often excluded from conservation endeavours: they are commonly carried out in the absence of mana whenua or with the benefit of any indigenous input. Further, Treaty settlements are gradually transforming conservation management models, and these will continue to have significant implications at a national and regional level.

Māori and community led conservation initiatives

Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. Māori-led conservation projects are therefore a level above a typical community conservation endeavour. Their genesis and ongoing management are often intertwined with complex social and legal processes, such as Treaty settlements and large-scale shifts in governance. For example, the Te Urewera Act 2014 which returned the management of the Te Urewera National Park to traditional owners, Tūhoe. Part of the agreement saw a Board established which has taken over from DOC in the management of the Park.

Ongoing challenges for Māori-led conservation initiatives at a local level include the conflict that often exists between the desire to harvest traditional food sources from areas protected by Western-style prohibitionist stances on environmental management (Norton et al, 2016) and wider aspirations for economic development. Further, the use of indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) in ecological management can butt up against European notions of best practice. Examples of where successful integration is in progress however, do exist (see Harm, 2015 for an analysis of advancement on Maungatautari Ecological Island). Other issues include the decline in ecosystems brought about through colonisation, and the underlying justice issues of that.

Within this complex context, funding for Māori to carry out community conservation (including that on private land) is presently distributed through the Ngā Whenua Rāhui Fund and the Mātauranga Kura Taiao Fund through DOC. However, it is clear that – like community conservation in general – the funding model for Māori led conservation is inextricably linked to its management and the objectives at play. Flexibility and culturally appropriate frameworks at a governance level will be necessary. Novel legislation, policy and partnership arrangements will continue to be needed, and the governance models for conservation across New Zealand are likely to be contested, challenged and changed as a result. But reversing decline in our biological heritage will only be achieved in genuine partnership with Māori.

International obligations

New Zealand is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, a relationship managed by DOC. The principal national response to that status was released in 2000: the world-leading New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. The Strategy contained four pivotal goals, with the most cited being Goal 3, to;

Maintain and restore a full range of remaining natural habitats and ecosystems to a healthy functioning state, enhance critically scarce habitats, and sustain the more modified ecosystems in production and urban environments; and do what else is necessary to maintain and restore viable populations of all indigenous species and subspecies across their natural range and maintain their genetic diversity.

In addition to Goal 3, Goal 1 spoke to the need to engage people from all walks of life in conservation, Goal two to the need to do so in partnership with Māori and Goal 4 to maintain the genetic resources of introduced species.

Five years following the release of the Strategy, a review was undertaken of its implementation (Clarkson & Green, 2005). The authors of this review recognised that community conservation activity was on the rise, but that it would make more difference if proponents were encouraged to work in areas of high conservation priority (i.e. *If this support can be focused on the high priority areas or issues, then the gains for biodiversity could be even greater.*) The authors went on to highlight that the effectiveness of community conservation was poorly understood, and it is thus ‘difficult to assess what overall difference is being made’. Of specific relevance to this report was the following recommendation from the authors:

That the Condition and Advice funds are continued, but with a particular effort to target critically threatened ecosystems and species, with monitoring as well as reporting requirements built into the funding process. (Theme 8). (Green and Clarkson, 2005 p.40).

Many of the issues identified in this review are live today and remain a barrier to demonstrating and celebrating the value of community conservation.

The role of the Department of Conservation

The Department of Conservation has principal statutory responsibility for the protection of biodiversity on public land, the protection of species covered by the Wildlife Act 1953 wherever they are found, and a wide range of other responsibilities conferred in statute. Their role gives primacy to environmental protection over other interests such as recreation and tourism. DOC is also charged with an advocacy function to promote appropriate consideration of conservation values in statutory policy and planning,

such as in the development of the national priorities for conservation on private land.⁴ The Department also administers New Zealand's Threat Classification System and the development and promotion of protocols for best practice conservation techniques.

The Department is active in supporting conservation partners and at present administers more than 400 formalised partnerships with community groups and the private sector. However, there remains a lack of express recognition of the relationship between what DOC does and what community conservation does or could deliver. This is in part due to the opaque context for conservation, and most particularly the uncertain place for community conservation in DOC and wider policy.

An example of this lack of recognition is the 2017 Draft Threatened Species Strategy. The Draft Strategy made little more than a passing mention of community conservation; in fact, the term is mentioned only once in relation to the 'War on Weeds' (DOC, 2017 p.18). This was despite very strong political and managerial narratives about the importance of community-led initiatives and its ability to support, mimic and even replace government-led programmes. The Draft Strategy was made available for public comment until July 2017. Since submissions have closed, no public statements have been made about its revision and release. The change of government may have been material to the silence.

Credit where due

Several community conservation respondents noted that agencies often took credit for work that had been primarily achieved because of community efforts and non-government funding. Similarly, agency staff found their contribution was often not appreciated, especially where the input was in kind. Agency staff noted that groups and individuals felt entitled to assistance, and sometimes lack appreciation for the 'support burden' placed on underfunded agencies as a whole. Similar concerns were raised by some agencies about other agencies claiming credit for outcomes they'd been involved with to a limited extent or not at all and likened it to 'turning up to the barbeque without any meat'.

It seemed clearly recognised that agencies can't 'take meat to all the barbeques' and that their resources need to be more carefully prioritised. However, at a local level the importance of clear attribution of effort from success is unquestionable. No agency or organisation should be taking credit for work it has not played a role in. Similarly, when outcomes depend on multiple efforts, all should be acknowledged. But such muddles are enabled by a lack of transparency and a failure to elucidate outcomes. A stronger focus on the monitoring and reporting of outcomes should help to demonstrate the relative value and contribution of players to conservation endeavours in the long term.

⁴ DOC and the Ministry for the environment released a guidance document on private land priorities to support decision making in development control. The release of the document also followed a failed attempt at developing a National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity under the RMA. Protecting Our Places: Information about the National Priorities for Protecting Rare and Threatened Biodiversity on Private Land (2006). See further discussion in Brown et al 2015.

The role of regional councils

New Zealand is divided into sixteen regions, each with a regional council or unitary authority charged with biodiversity related responsibilities. The extent to which regional councils enact these responsibilities differ immensely, depending on political will, technical capacity and financial resources. The focus of regional councils on biodiversity has been evolving in the last decade; for some it remains a discretionary concern while for others it is core business. There is limited national direction on biodiversity, given the repeat failures to implement a National Policy Statement on the topic to provide direction (Brown et al, 2015).⁵

The regional councils and unitary authorities recently commissioned a think piece that identified five key shifts necessary to make regional councils more effective in exercising their biodiversity mandate. These were; the need to address the lack of conservation leadership, particularly on private land; the need for regional councils to promote their core role more effectively; the need for better data to inform prioritisation and outcome monitoring; the need to work more effectively with other entities to 'join up' effort; and the need for a more robust statutory basis for biodiversity management nationally (Willis, 2017). Many of these shifts and the drivers of the need for them are reflected in this report, as they are highly relevant to improving community conservation outcomes.

The role of city and district councils

City and district councils sit below regional councils and city and district functions form part of the role of unitary authorities. This level of government is in general far less active in conservation, and particularly in the support and resourcing of community conservation although there are exceptions (e.g. Wellington City Council). However, city and district councils have a crucial role in managing the use of land, and within that the '*protection of areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna*' under section 6 of the RMA. If councils are inactive or disinterested in conservation at a local level, then the amount of community conservation carried out may also be limited.⁶

⁵ A trust has been established to administer a collaborative process to formulate a recommended Proposed National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity, focusing primarily on terrestrial matters and the freshwater interplay. The process is underway and will conclude in 2018.

⁶ Local proponents of conservation can find support from agencies other than local councils, including the QEII National Trust, the New Zealand Landcare Trust and others.

Prioritisation of conservation activities

Conservation faces a universal dearth of resources. This means that achieving high level objectives relies on making sure what resources are available are mustered to best effect. Conservation prioritisation is a process where the possible actions (e.g. possum control) and environments (units of area) are ranked according to importance. It can be defined as proactive, science-led identification of conservation priorities, and the subsequent prioritisation of protection and management activities (Moilanen, 2010).

‘Systemic conservation planning’ is used to prioritise conservation actions, a process with six key steps:

1. Compile data on the biodiversity of the planning region
2. Identify conservation goals for the planning region
3. Review existing conservation areas
4. Select additional conservation actions
5. Implement conservation actions
6. Maintain the required values of conservation area (Margules and Pressey, 2000)

Prioritisation of actions demands not only that choices are made about what management to do, but that those choices clearly leave what will not be carried out (due to the resource shortfall).

The implications of prioritisation can include the withdrawal of agency resources from areas that had previously been receiving control (e.g. withdrawal of management of a locally important kiwi population) to enable those resources to be deployed to more urgent, pressing tasks. This can be controversial within and outside of agencies.

However, the alternative to a systematic approach is that the size of the task is never elucidated, the trade-offs are never made explicit and progress and impact substantially more challenging to demonstrate. Considering these strengths, spatial prioritisation of conservation actions is increasingly used by conservation agencies, most particularly regional councils.

The role of landowners

This report generally clumps landowners and community groups together, but it is important to recognise their differences. Many landowners are very active in conservation on their own land. For instance, the Department of Conservation administers nearly 1000 covenants on private land and the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust boasts 4400 covenant holders under their bespoke legislation, many of which report they

are engaged in active management. Outside of legally protected private land, it is unclear how many landowners carry out conservation tasks, but the number is likely substantial.

Landowners have a basic 'duty of care' responsibility to protect and manage biodiversity on their land and yield greater individual rewards (e.g. amenity values, legacy, increased farm productivity, and long-term farm and community resilience) from doing so than members of community groups operating on public land. However, landowners play an important role in community conservation. The management of biodiversity assets on private land contributes to public benefits off-site and at district, catchment, and national scales. Further, landowners can also contribute to community conservation through involvement with local conservation groups.

The resulting context for community conservation

The growth of community conservation and the burgeoning interest from corporate and philanthropic entities in supporting the sector is a major strategic shift that has occurred in New Zealand over the past few decades (Willis, 2017). But its place alongside government is unclear and its capability and outcomes disputed. The statutory context is reflective of government having primary responsibility to protect values of national importance, and this is properly their role and clearly reflected in the institutional context for conservation. But does this justify strategic silence as to the role of community conservation?

Silence also contrasts with a dominant narrative in recent years, that community conservation can and will take a leadership role in conservation and agencies must even 'step aside'. As discussed later, such assertions find limited support in empirical evidence. The effectiveness of community conservation is at least in part contingent upon the effectiveness and political strength of the public agencies it works alongside. In the absence of coherent central and local government effort, community conservation is unlikely to be able to make a significant and strategic impact on the fate of biodiversity.

Community conservation cannot walk alone. In fact, narratives suggesting otherwise may well be having a negative impact on conservation as a sector overall by undermining agencies with statutory responsibilities for biodiversity protection. In effect, community conservation that unfairly criticises supporting government agencies, may ultimately do itself a significant disservice. The following section sets out the state of community conservation in terms of who is participating, what they are doing, how that is being resourced and what's being achieved.

Part III The state of community conservation in brief

Key messages

- Participation in community conservation is rising
- Conservation is a technical endeavour that relies on expertise and scale
- Community conservation in most circumstances is a complement to agency efforts
- Social outcomes from community conservation are generally understood, but ecological outcomes are much less clear

This section is a non-exhaustive outline of the current state of community conservation in New Zealand is summarised below covering three key areas:

1. how many and who are participating (participation),
2. what they do (activities), and
3. who funds it (finance) and
4. what outcomes they achieve (outcomes).

Participation

Community conservation as a sector has expanded significantly in recent decades. The scale of community (non-government) conservation also varies considerably from very large corporatized NGOs such as Forest and Bird through to a small gaggle of keen volunteers that focus on restoration of an urban reserve, and individual landowners trapping and planting on their own property. Overall, conservation has become something of a national past time and many are very willing to forgo their leisure time and (often) their personal finances to contribute to environmental protection.

The community conservation sector is also inherently self-organising. Projects are initiated on a wide range of conservation tasks and the capacity and capability of the organisation or individual will vary considerably. Some projects are carried out with close involvement from public agencies and many others are not looped in at all. A key dimension of voluntarism is that it is extraordinarily hard to direct voluntary efforts. Attempts to 'govern' self-motivated groups and individuals can be met with reproach and volunteers may reduce their effort or disappear altogether.

The sector has shown a remarkable ability to galvanise communities to support local scale initiatives (e.g. Predator Free Crofton Downs) and this has benefits on several levels. Individual benefits accrue from volunteering in conservation (Blaschke, 2013) as well as any wider social and ecological benefits to ecosystems and the community at large. The degree of public value of any initiative depends on a range of variables including the capacity and capability of the group or landowner, the amount of support made available and the conservation importance of the task.

Focus on the sanctuaries

Nationwide, thousands of volunteers contribute to the 62 sanctuaries covering 56,000ha. Other estimates put the number at over 130 (Butler et al, 2014). Sanctuaries are projects that aspire to;

- Eradicate the full suite of pests (or achieve near-zero pest densities) from their chosen areas
- Reintroduce missing species including many rare and endangered species
- Involve local communities in restoration

The sanctuaries were core catalysts of community conservation, because they demonstrated the kinds of things that could be achieved with sustained effort by committed individuals (usually with significant support from public agencies) (Brown et al, 2015). Sanctuaries New Zealand is an informal network for these projects and has a paid coordinator and runs regular meetings.

Sanctuaries, where they are community led however, are strongly dependant on public agencies for financial and in-kind support. Almost all science-related output from sanctuary efforts is produced and funded by public agencies and/or academics and their tertiary institutions. See for example Watts et al 2017, which outlined the results of five years of trials related to mice on Maungatautari, a mountain restoration project in the Waikato. Equally of course, agency led conservation projects are often extraordinarily dependent upon volunteer labour and input.

While the numbers of individuals and groups participating in community conservation are not known for sure, estimates climb with each passing year. More than 600 groups are presently active in community conservation (Ross, 2009). Group involvement equates to somewhere between 25000 and 45000 participants nationwide (Handford, 2011) and the addition of landowners may increase that figure significantly. There is no definitive source list of conservation groups, so nobody really knows how many there are and there is no way to be sure all have been engaged with in the event an exhaustive collation effort was carried out (Moon, 2018).

Peters et al (2015) developed a profile of community conservation groups via an online survey (296 participants), yielding interesting insights into the structure of groups engaged in ecological restoration. Key observations included that approximately 80% of groups had been operating for more than 6 years, but that many relied on an ageing demographic to undertake their work,⁷ threatening their long-term sustainability. Most community conservation groups are small (72% have fewer than 20 participants) but most (90%) were supported by partner agencies such as DOC and councils. Key recommendations for further research by Peters et al included work on (1) community environmental group governance and

⁷ Cowie 2010 demonstrated that a significant proportion of volunteers are over retirement age.

partnership models, (2) factors contributing to groups' longevity, and (3) groups' environmental outcomes.

Much research has been undertaken on what drives individuals and groups to be involved in voluntary activities of any kind. Findings have indicated that social interaction, the chance to learn new skills and to improve connections within the community are as important as the opportunity to contribute to conservation outcomes. Further, community conservation volunteers do not have to be there. If the experience is not serving their reasons to show up, they simply won't. Further, participants may not be driven by conservation outcomes in the way agency efforts are. To this end the public value of community conservation may sometimes be restricted to the social benefits, as direct ecological benefits may be minimal.⁸

Smooth operators – are we funding the right things?

Success in attracting funding may only be loosely related to the conservation importance of projects. Several key informants noted that the groups that were most successful were often the most professionalised, most politically connected and best able to articulate what they want or need. Where this capability coincides with conservation priority it is likely to catalyse very good ecological outcomes. However, allocation of funding appears generally to be only weakly based on conservation need, or conservation need may comprise only a minor consideration in the overall analysis of proposals.

A good example provided by an interviewee is the 'east-west divide' presently noted to be operating in Northland. On the west coast conservation actions are primarily carried out by small organisations or individuals operating in often impoverished and remote areas, with less access to professional assistance and less visibility overall. Conversely, the wealthier east coast is comparatively better resourced for what are often less important endeavours.

The differential comes down to the ability to attract funding i.e. not what you know, it's who you know. Having these variables so influential in fund distribution is likely to disproportionately affect community projects in impoverished areas or where professional expertise within the group is missing or in short supply. Distributing funding based on conservation priority may assist in dissolving some of these inequalities.

⁸ Indirect ecological benefits may arise from individuals being engaged in community conservation and thus making different political or lifestyle choices that have benefits for conservation endeavours (often termed engaging 'hearts and minds'), but this link is poorly understood and does not at present necessarily justify public investment where conservation objectives are of primary concern.

Activities

Community conservation covers a wide gambit of activities. The variety of tasks include planting, pest control, species conservation, advocacy and education. However, many are tightly focussed on one or two activities. The different activities can be attractive to different numbers and types of volunteers. Many large-scale advocacy actions coordinated by community conservationists have galvanised public attitudes and formed an important part of New Zealand's environmental history (e.g. Lake Manapouri water levels, the protection of public native forests from logging). Although this report focuses primarily on groups and individuals carrying out active conservation tasks, the importance of the sector from an advocacy perspective is well noted.

Groups and individuals may operate in the same environment or undertaking similar and related activities. For example, Norton et al (2016) noted that across the 100,000 hectares of Banks Peninsula, nine different agencies and organisations were closely involved in ecological restoration, but efforts were not coordinated. Many authors and commentators note the obvious potential for community conservationists to 'join up' their effort to enable them to do more with the same resources by avoiding duplication. However, although this potential certainly exists, sometimes the joining up doesn't occur.

Research carried out in the Waikato identified some of the reasons for this as being; groups have different mandates and approaches that may not be compatible, they had different structures that made working together difficult, they had no free resources to consider or broker collaborative arrangements and that the competitive funding environment disincentivised working together (Hungerford, 2017). This suggests that 'joining up' efforts would in part be addressed by providing further resourcing, but more likely to occur if that resourcing was coupled with support to catalyse integration. This indicates that catalyst agencies may be very valuable, and there is certainly cause for optimism when one considers where similar agencies or collaborative arrangements already exist (e.g. Wild for Taranaki).

Finance

Community conservation relies on 'un-costed' (note: not free) volunteer input. Volunteers may participate in community conservation for many reasons, but they are united by the fact that the hours spent do not net income. However, there remain costs to be met for those administering projects. These costs include that of plants, traps, health and safety equipment, stationary and other supplies and must generally (though not always) be covered by funds sourced externally. Many projects also employ staff, although funding their salaries is a constant challenge.

A wide range of environmental funding agencies operate around New Zealand. At present, the environmental funding landscape is one of many relatively small funds designated for different purposes, and only a few large and general funders (mainly government agencies). Many small funds are

geographically restricted in who and what they can fund. This research does not present an exhaustive analysis of all the funds available and all the support frameworks available – such a mapping exercise is underway elsewhere by Philanthropy New Zealand. In addition to traditional funding models (i.e. contestable applications) Table 1 sets out the range of ways community conservation initiatives are funded internationally and highlights New Zealand examples wherever possible.

At present most support to community conservation is provided by public agencies in the form of in-kind coordination and advice, technical support and monitoring. This is a subsidy which is granted to community conservation that means some agency resources cannot be deployed to their own work programmes. This fact means that the assistance provided for community conservation by agencies should have a material benefit that aligns with organisational (and in most case, statutory) objectives. In the absence of these benefits being realised with the funding, the justification to provide it is very questionable from a public good perspective. Support to community groups and landowners that is in-kind is also typically financed specifically from the environmental funding of the organisation, meaning it can displace the capacity for the agency to carry out active conservation, in support of an often less certain community led outcome.

Community groups have several organisations that they can approach for assistance for different things, but there is no one source and no clear depository for information to be collated and shared in the sector. Each local (e.g. district council), regional (e.g. council or collaborative network such as Reconnecting Northland) and national (e.g. DOC) entity functions differently, according to different objectives and resources and effort into supporting community initiatives may fluctuate significantly over time as they grapple with their own workloads.

It seems evident that more support is needed for the benefit of both community conservation and agencies – to empower and enable outcomes from the first and to alleviate the support burden for the latter. The objectives of the entity that would provide that extra support, the institutional context, and the scale or scales at which it would desirably operate would be influential in how it is structured and what other outcomes it may strive for. Models for providing support to community led initiatives are found throughout the world and are enormously varied (see for instance, the Natural England (formerly English Nature) case study from the UK). Indeed the need for more support at a regional level at least has already been identified.

The PCE report proposed ‘regional hubs’ that could provide services to community conservation such as;

- *administrative and accounting expertise;*
- *assistance with funding applications and reporting;*
- *training and certification in trapping and laying poison, including health and safety;*
- *advice on plant choices and habitat restoration; and*
- *sharing of information among groups (PCE, 2017 p.110).*

It is also recognised that similar organisations are already operating in some parts of the country, that carry out all or part of this list. Further, Hungerford (2017) identified that community groups valued regional-scale umbrella organisations where they existed.

Natural England

Originally established as 'English Nature' in 1990, the purpose of Natural England is to promote the conservation of wildlife in the United Kingdom pursuant to the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Other similar entities carried out the same functions in the rest of Great Britain. Part of its role is to distribute funding and support grass-roots initiatives as well as to provide advice to government on environmental matters.

The organisation is a non-departmental public body funded through the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The organisation presently has 2000 staff throughout the UK and works to a strategy called 'Conservation 21' that sets out a way forward for conservation in the 21st century, elucidating the roles of all players. Key tenets of the strategy include:

- The need to achieve landscape scale conservation and take an ecosystems approach
- The need to engage everybody in different ways and increase their positive impact
- The need to enhance natural capital through sensible directing of resources.

The strategy overall is based on an underpinning that is outcomes focussed.

The Natural England example nearing its 30th year (albeit transformed in that time) demonstrates the value of sustained leadership for nature conservation, the importance of an agency that can be a catalyst between different groups working in the same space and the advantage of a government-based agency over a more changeable construct such as an NGO. In addition to supporting grass-roots initiatives, Natural England also publishes data on environmental matters, convenes workshops and undertakes research within a statutory framework and consequential public accountability. Its national scale enables such significant initiatives to be undertaken.

Table 1: A review of funding sources used to support community conservation internationally

Source		Explanation	Example	Currently operation in New Zealand?
Contestable funding and grants	From government	Applicants apply for capital in regular cycles with varying objectives, processes and conditions.	DOC Community Fund - Pūtea Tautiaki Hapori	Yes – majority of community conservation funding is likely raised this way. ⁹
	From philanthropists		Environment Education Action Fund and The Habitat Protection Fund administered by WWF New Zealand and funded by the Tindall Foundation.	Yes – increasingly common source of funding.
	From corporates		Air New Zealand Environment Trust	Yes – increasingly common source of funding.
Mandatory mitigation monies		Development projects that cause harm to environmental values can be mandated under (principally) the RMA to provide fiscal or in-kind support to community conservation initiatives.	Otanewainuku Kiwi Trust receives a quantum of funding annually from an adjacent quarry, as a condition of a resource consent the quarry holds.	Yes
Sponsorship from public		Sponsorship arrangements can exist between groups and supporters. These arrangements can appeal to donors that live remote from	Rimutaka Forest Park Trust ‘sponsorship programme’ • Sponsor a Kiwi per year per kiwi	Yes

⁹ It is assumed this is the case, but there is not empirical evidence that demonstrates that public funding constitutes the majority of funding for community conservation.

Source	Explanation	Example	Currently operation in New Zealand?
	the organisation or that wish to contribute instead of or in addition to actively participating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsor a Tree \$30 per native tree or plant • Sponsor a Trap \$30 per year per trap • Sponsor a Transmitter \$400 per year • Name a kiwi chick \$2,000 	
Crowdfunding	Many people contribute typically small amounts of money to a stated cause, usually facilitated by the internet and run as a campaign that may be short or long term.	<p>Million Metres Stream Project administered by the Sustainable Business Network has funded the restoration of nearly 25,000 metres of riparian corridor to date.</p> <p>The NZ Native Forest Restoration Trust purchases forest blocks for conservation purposes in this way too.</p>	Yes and increasingly so. Common websites include PledgeMe, Givealittle and bespoke platforms.
Impact investment	A financial investment that seeks both a conservation outcome and an economic return.	Harmony Initiative	Limited implementation, although opportunities exist.
Social enterprise	A purpose-driven business model that is designed to achieve public good objectives alongside returns for owners/shareholders. In conservation this means yielding ecological outcomes while turning profit.	Wilding and Co fund wilding pine control in the South Island through the sale of essential oils.	Yes – increasingly common although capital costs can make starting up a challenge.
Mixed-model conservation	Managing land by combining conservation objectives with working land activities to	Blue Duck Station runs a tourism business that in part funds conservation work on and near the property.	Yes

Source	Explanation	Example	Currently operation in New Zealand?
	enable conservation to be funded and securely so.		
Water trading	The lease and sale of water rights, from which a proportion of profit is directed at conservation on an ongoing basis.	Murray Darling Balanced Water Fund	No
Fundraising events	An event or series of events are organised to glean money for conservation, by selling items or experiences.	Real Journeys (a tourism company) organised a charity ball in support of bird conservation, raising \$65,000 to contribute to the eradication of mammals off an island in Dusky Sound.	Yes
PES schemes (Payments for ecosystem services)	Landowners or managers get paid to maintain the biodiversity/ nature (natural capital stocks) which contribute to the provision of ecosystem services (e.g. carbon sequestration).	Australian Environmental Stewardship Programme for private landowners, with evaluation to date highlighting reverse auctions as the most appropriate method for fund allocation (MacLeod and Moller, 2013).	No

Dollar value of conservation volunteers

Volunteers contribute significant amounts of time to community conservation, either on their own land, helping agencies with their core conservation work or initiating and sustaining their own endeavours. Research funded by the Department of Conservation in 2010 (Hardie-Boys 2010) aimed to capture the value of the contribution of these efforts. A survey of the (then) 362 'community partners' of the Department attempted to elicit the 'types and benefits' of their partnership arrangements with DOC and the value of the resources they bring to conservation. More than half (201) of the 362 responded, of which less than half (43.5%) had a formalised partnership agreement at that time. For each dollar of government funding, approximately \$1.34 of income was drawn from non-government sources.

When this figure was taken together with an estimate of the volunteer hours provided, the economic contribution of the 6 232 volunteers giving 174 812 hours of their time over a year was estimated at \$15.8 million. The result of this significant contribution, is that for every \$1 of government funding, the return was \$3–\$4. Social outcomes were contributed to more than ecological and historic/heritage outcomes. Groups surveyed indicated that a lack of funding was their key challenge (Hardie-Boys, 2010). This research suggests that government gets good value from contributing to conservation in terms of dollar for dollar matching but does not shed much light on the ecological outcomes achieved by those efforts.

In 2015, Trust Waikato and Waikato Regional Council co-funded an analysis of the 'community-based environmental sector' (Hungerford, 2015). The purpose of the report was to; *'describe the community-based response to environmental activity, and how this is organised and funded, and identify the relevant local and central government, iwi, philanthropic and other groups in operation in this area, and any opportunities for collaboration to maximise available funding'*. The report (and a subsequent report) focused entirely on the Waikato and made the following conclusions;

- Some environmental activities were more difficult to find funding for than others (admin v plants)
- Larger projects can attract significant amounts of funding, while smaller groups struggle
- Lack of time, lack of awareness of other groups and patch protection are barriers to groups collaborating where they operate in the same place
- The lack of capacity for administration and governance and other skilled endeavours
- The withdrawal of agency conservation work from areas may leave the community and iwi with no way to continue the management (e.g. TB-related pest control ending).

The review concluded that funding and coordination of the environmental sector were two of several key issues that needed to be addressed (Hungerford, 2015).

A follow-up report analysed the key needs and challenges of the community-based environmental sector (based on 65 organisations) in the Waikato Region in greater depth. The survey attached to the research identified two key issues: financial security and human resources. A summary quote was included that noted the main challenge being:

‘Staying solvent and not burning out. Everything else is secondary to that. If they can have enough funding to keep the wheels turning and enough skilled people to share the load, then they can succeed’.

In respect of financial security, respondents noted that having core long term funding and good relationships with local funders was highly valued and enabled some measure of sustainability.¹⁰ Difficulties raising money for administration was identified as a key challenge, as was obtaining funding for ongoing work rather than start-up costs or ‘new’ things. Many groups also had an interest in developing social enterprises to raise funds but were challenged by the fact that establishing social enterprises has initial costs that also must be funded, in addition to (presumably) demanding a different array of skills than might be present in an ordinary membership (Hungerford, 2017).

Human resources identified the challenges of relying on volunteers, and the complexity of managing a voluntary workforce in general. Other issues such as a lack of necessary skills/capacity and the need to plan for succession as volunteers age or move on also loomed large (Hungerford, 2017). Although this research was confined to the Waikato, the findings are extremely interesting and likely relevant across New Zealand.

The funding struggle for community groups is noted by agencies dispensing the money. The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) coordinated six workshops in mid-2017 to engage with recipients of DIA funding for community activities. Key issues identified¹¹ as:

- The need to centralise grant processes and leverage information already submitted to central government for other grant purposes
- Introduce and improve online application processes for ease of use
- Improve and simplify information and advice for applicants
- Increase availability of multi-year funding
- Improve processes around accountability and grant tracking (DIA, 2017)

¹⁰ In this context, sustainability refers to financial sustainability. However, many groups rely on having someone (be it paid staff or a volunteer) to coordinate the expenditure of the funds. With many relying principally on the efforts of one or two individuals; wider sustainability concerns may also be relevant.

¹¹ Major themes were identified as being a collection of comments with similar attributes that were raised at more than two workshops and by multiple tables within at least one workshop. Minor themes were identified as being raised at more than two workshops, but not by multiple tables.

While these workshops were not conservation-specific, many of the concerns are common and thus learnings from other sectors are likely available. This suggests that lessons can be learned from other sectors grappling with funding and coordination issues. Basic issues such as being paid retrospectively for capital expenses are likely to apply across all sectors (see case study).

Funding vexations: retrospective payments

What the community conservation sector needs, and what and how funders are prepared to fund can differ significantly. Several groups in the survey commented that it is easier to get funding and volunteers for predator control and planting, than plant pest management and administration. This reflected the findings of the PCE in 2017. But quite apart from what is being funded, many community conservationists expressed frustration at the way the funding was dispensed.

Groups and landowners voiced concern about funders that pay out retrospectively. While most recognised the practicalities of needing to pay to an invoice rather than a notional view of what will be purchased (say, in the case of buying plants) many were bemused at how the agency expected them to purchase goods and expertise in the meantime. This was particularly the case for smaller groups that may not have any cashflow, therefore relying on the generosity of local nurseries or having to pay for costs out of member's own pockets. Several landowners expressed that they found funding processes so cumbersome and difficult that they simply chose to fund their efforts alone, and often carried very negative perceptions of the (most public) funding agencies as a result.

Further to this, late payments of owed funding would be doubly problematic, and several anecdotes were offered in the key informant interviews of community groups waiting several months for reimbursement by funders (including DOC and councils) due to slow administration. It is likely that a more robust focus on expected outcomes may give funders more confidence that what is applied for is achieved, thus enabling earlier release of some or all the allocations. Further, fairer and more fit for purpose funding parameters and processes would do very much better at engendering crucial goodwill.

Funding is diverse. Philanthropic funding has in some ways stepped in to fill the gap in attention and resourcing for community conservation (Willis, 2017) and corporate sponsorship is increasingly common. However public funding, overall, would still seem to dominate (Norton et al, 2016). Funders fall into at least three distinct groups, all with very different operating modes, drivers and accountabilities.

What funders want

Public funding agencies, philanthropists and corporate sponsors all operate differently. Each of the three has quite distinct drivers and it is important that the nuances are appreciated by applicants and the wider conservation community.

Public agency

Public agencies have complex statutory mandates that include objectives ranging from the ecological to the social. The funding they receive and dispense is tagged for statutory purposes. Community conservation will increasingly need to demonstrate the public value of its work, most particularly the alignment with the high-level goals of an agency.

Philanthropic organisation

Philanthropic organisations are increasingly involved in financing agency and non-agency conservation efforts. They are rarely formed by way of statute, so are not legally bound to focus on areas or outcomes. They are free to channel their contribution to causes they are individually drawn to, and may not be aligned with conservation priorities, or even conservation's overall objectives. Philanthropy is extraordinarily diverse and challenging to encapsulate the motivations of.

Corporate sponsor

Sponsorship is different from funding and grants and relies on the recipient repeatedly demonstrating their value and having that value translate to the bottom line or social license to operate for the corporate. There is a more reciprocal relationship, wherein the funder expects a material benefit from providing the money or support. These arrangements usually require professionalisation of the group and the capacity to continually demonstrate that value. Sponsorship can be quickly provided and even more quickly withdrawn in the event of non-delivery of required value or other conflict.

As part of the background work for this research, the requirements of a wide range of funders were reviewed with the feedback from the conservation community. This exercise demonstrated that many of the vexations highlighted in the key informant interviews and in the survey were indeed present in the requirements of funders (see case study on time limited funding). Funders have their own requirements, some are based in statute, others in policy and others are founded on personal philosophy. The legitimacy of the reasons for requiring the information set out or having the parameters in place that exist is difficult to ascertain from a desktop study. Certainly, in interviews, funders were generally sympathetic to their target communities and were usually conscious of the need to improve practice and process.

Funding time limits: penalising success

Many groups and landowners voiced their concern that the funding system as it stands penalises any notion of success due to arbitrary time limits on receiving funds. Many funds limit what they dispense to a single group to a maximum of a single grant, or sometimes up to 3 or 4 years. Such timeframes are minor given the long-term goals of many groups, and the nature of activities undertaken.

A discontinuation in funding for no other reason than such a time limit may mean failing to maintain outcomes already achieved and can result in a lot of work going down the drain (e.g. reinvasion of mammalian predators following a successful period of pest control). Meanwhile, the investment in the 'new' venture may not yield the same conservation outcomes as the project abandoned and is unlikely to compensate for the lost investment of the outcomes being eroded. If funders are genuinely concerned with driving outcomes, such time limits may need to be reviewed.

Outcomes of funding

Brooks et al (2013) noted the importance of gaining a better understanding of the effectiveness of community conservation and of the factors associated with failure or success. Relatively little is known about the effectiveness of community conservation efforts in New Zealand, particularly in ecological terms (Jones and Kirk, 2018). This is due to a lack of data at a grant, a fund and a landscape level. Information is patchy and often focuses on inputs (plants planted) and outputs (number of traps set, volunteers participating, rats caught) rather than cataloguing changes in the environment because of the conservation efforts. Evaluation of effectiveness relies on criteria for measuring that effectiveness being established upfront (Galbraith et al 2016). There is clear evidence that outcomes are not considered to the extent necessary in current funding processes.

Peters et al (2016) analysed the state of community-based environmental monitoring (CBEM) in New Zealand, demonstrating the following key matters;

- That although ecosystem monitoring toolkits were available to assist groups to track changes in the environment, they were not often used (c.19%)
- Groups managing large areas and with medium to high support from partner agencies (DOC and councils) were the most likely to be undertaking monitoring
- Lack of funding, adequate number of volunteers and lack of capability were identified as key barriers to carrying out monitoring.

These findings indicate that tool availability is not the issue: the time, money, enthusiasm, expertise and support to use the tools is.

Many grants are dispensed without any articulation of the ecological outcomes that will be achieved. Jones and Kirk (2018) analysed the outcomes anticipated from 89 funding applications. There is no standardised framework by which to do so, so Jones and Kirk assessed the desired outcomes of the applications against the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (2000) and the 'SMART' framework for goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound).

The results were somewhat disappointing, with only just over half of the applications (53%) containing one or more outcomes that aligned with the Biodiversity Strategy. None of the proposals met all the 'SMART' requirements and the authors concluded that funders would be unlikely to be able to assess the return on investment from the information presented. Recommendations arising from this research included the provision for support for monitoring and evaluation to fund recipients and that funders should require more information on outcomes (Jones and Kirk, 2018).

It is true that in the absence of a requirement to demonstrate conservation outcomes for funding purposes, many community-based projects may have limited incentives to report on achievements. Funders have an important role in catalysing better practice around capturing the benefits of community conservation and could potentially reach a point at which they are able to report at a fund level on the ecological outcomes achieved from their investments. At present, the general focus on inputs and outputs only serves nobody.

Part IV Survey results: the view from the front

Key Messages:

- The majority of conservation projects have been running for less than five years.
- Over half the projects received funding of less than \$5 000; and 70% received less than \$25, 000 in a typical year.
- Predator control is by far the most common activity for which funding was sought.
- It is common for less than 25% of applications for funding to be successful in a typical year.
- Most conservation projects received funding from less than five funding sources.
- Over a third of respondents think the effort required to obtain the amount of funding they received is 'about right'.
- The clear majority of respondents described their relationship with their current funders as 'constructive', 'good', or 'very positive'.
- However, the level of satisfaction with the current funding situation for community conservation is lower, suggesting larger-scale issues beyond relationships could be at play, and that there is significant room for improvement.
- The need to both grow funding of community conservation and improve allocation of funds was identified by respondents as key areas for improvement.
- The need to improve how the community conservation sector was operating was strongly identified.

The survey had a total of 16 questions, 14 with fixed, mandatory responses and two open-ended questions. During analysis of the survey findings, we treated landowner and community groups as distinct to consider whether there are any marked differences between their experiences and responses. We did not further break down the two groups by region, therefore some disparities between respondents may be explained by regional differences (e.g. amount of council funding available to landowners).

Who responded to the survey?

We received 316 respondents to the survey; 210 from community groups, 97 from private landowners and nine responses that fell into both of these categories. Thus, when analysing survey data by category, these nine responses are 'double-counted', bringing the number of community group responses to 219 and landowner responses to 106.

The survey achieved nationwide coverage, with each region being represented to some extent. The largest proportion of respondents were from Auckland (23%), followed by Waikato (15%), Northland (12%) and Wellington (10%). The lowest number of responses came from Gisborne (1%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Number and percent of survey respondents by region

Region	Number of respondents	Percentage of total
Northland	37	12
Auckland	74	23
Waikato	48	15
Bay of Plenty	19	6
Gisborne	3	1
Hawkes Bay	10	3
Taranaki	11	3
Manawatu-Wanganui	6	2
Wellington	33	10
Tasman	12	4
Nelson	5	2
Marlborough	8	3
West Coast	7	2
Canterbury	17	5
Otago	16	5
Southland	10	3
Total	316	

How long have the conservation projects been running?

Most projects (39% of community-group led projects; 46% of landowner projects) have been running for less than five years, although over a third (38%) of the community-group led projects had been running between six and ten years. Of note is the number of projects that have been running for over 11 years (Figure 1). Within the 11+ year bracket, 16% of total respondents indicated their projects had been running for more than two decades.

These results indicate that nearly half of existing conservation projects were not operating in 2012. This may reflect either that new groups/projects may be relatively more 'linked-in' to the PFNZ network and therefore more likely to have been notified of the survey, or it may simply reflect the recent upsurge in conservation groups. A greater proportion of landowners than community groups were both relatively

recent entrants to the conservation scene (0–5 years) and running longer timescale projects (11+ years). Community groups were more strongly skewed to the ‘younger’ end of the spectrum.

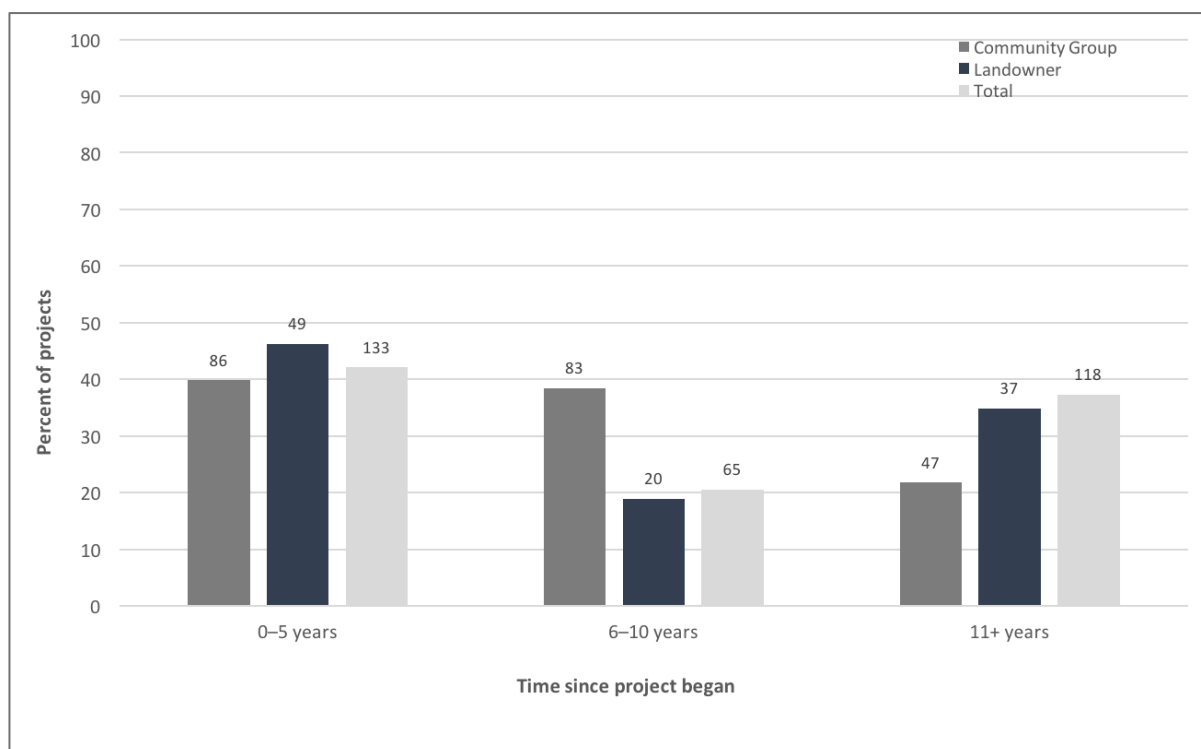


Figure 1: Length of time since project began for community group projects (n=219), landowner projects (n = 106), and total number of survey respondents (n = 316). *The number of projects within each time range is shown above the bars for each category.*

How much funding is being allocated to community conservation projects?

Over half (60%) of survey respondents indicated they received funding of less than \$5 000 per year. Most landowners (82%) fell into this category. Only 2% of landowners and 9% of community groups received funding of more than \$100 000 annually. A total of 16% landowners and 43% of community groups reported receiving funding of between \$5 000 and \$100 000 each year; although most of these fall below \$25 000 (10% landowners and 26% community groups) (Figure 2).

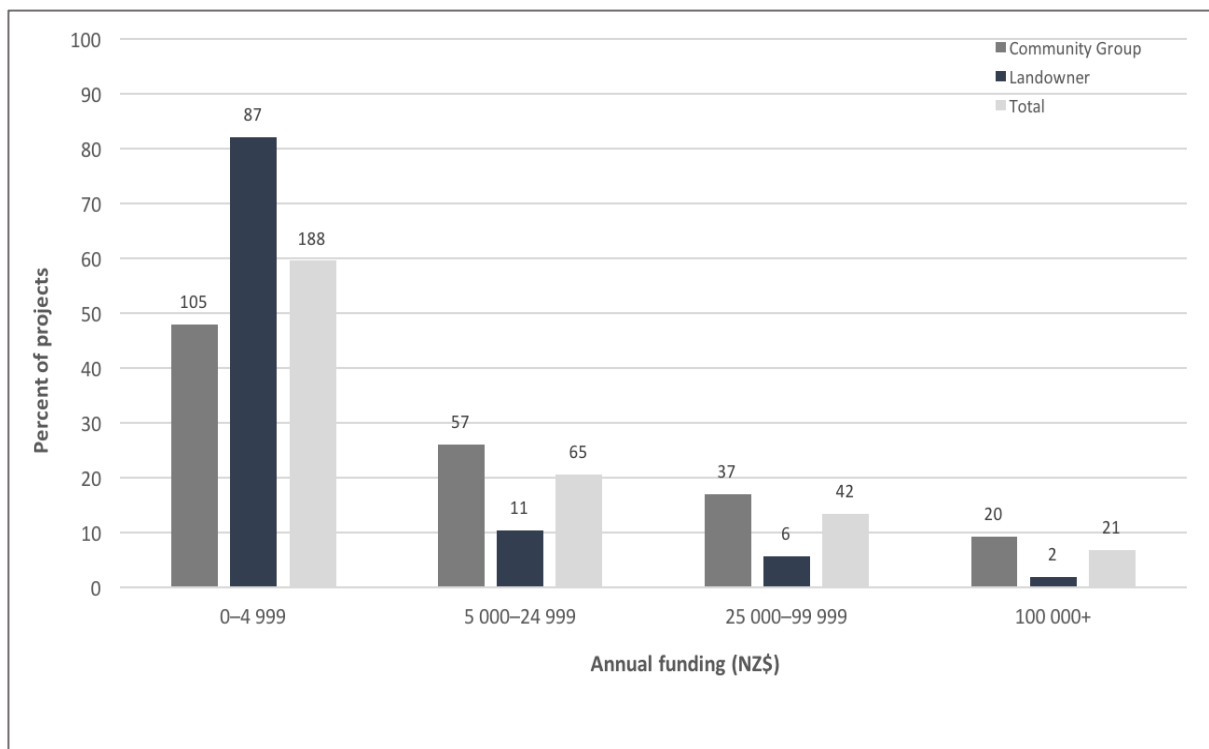


Figure 2: Amount of annual funding received for conservation projects by community group projects (n=219), landowner projects (n = 106), and total number of survey respondents (n = 316). *The number of projects within each funding range is shown above the bars for each category.*

Where is the money being spent?

Predator control was identified as by far the most common activity for which groups received funding, with the next most commonly funded activity (pest plant management) being more than twice less common (Figure 3). What is clear is that most of the funding sought is spent on activities that are on-the-ground conservation activities. ‘Education’ was indicated as a commonly funded activity 56 times (8%), which is to be expected given the often-critical role in community engagement in conservation issues that community groups play.

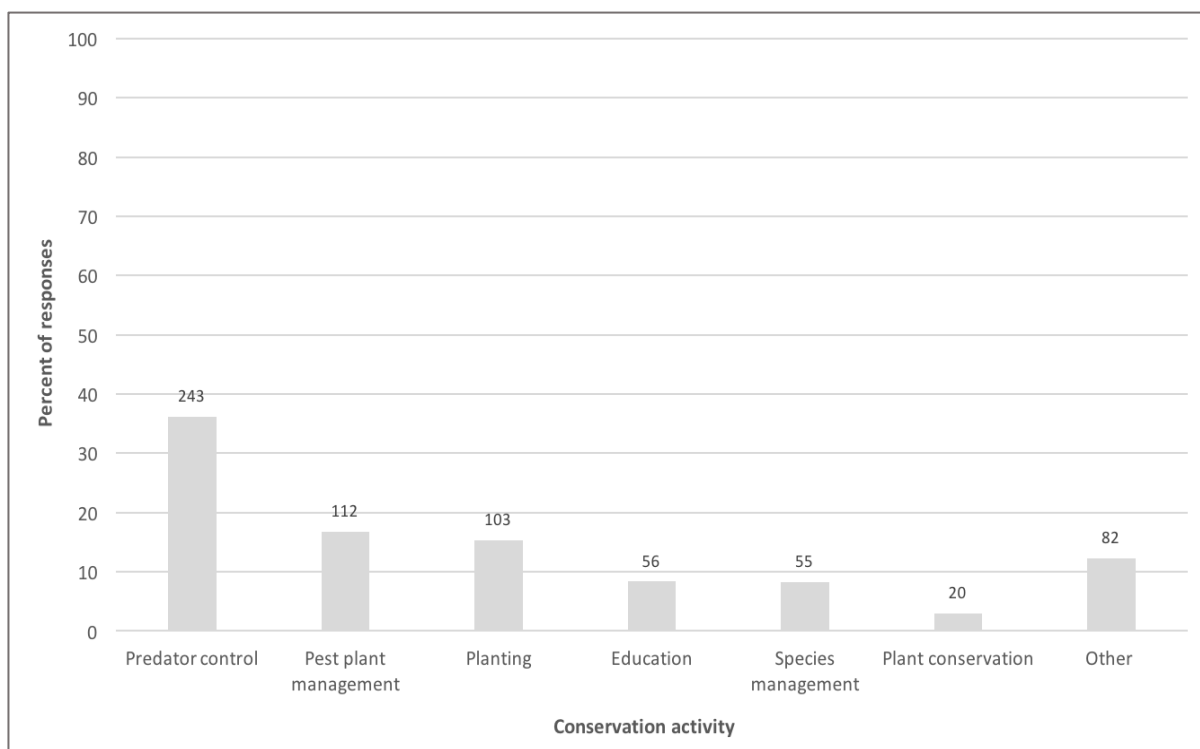


Figure 3: Most commonly funded conservation activities. Respondents of the survey indicated the two most common activities for which they received funding (n = 671). *The number of times each activity was identified is shown above the bars.*

How much effort is expended on obtaining funding?

An overwhelming proportion of respondents (79% of community groups and 94% of landowners) indicated that they make five or fewer applications for funding each year (Figure 4). This category also included those respondents who indicated they didn't apply for any funding. While this may seem a small number of applications, the burden of doing them would easily exceed the resources of a small group. Further, the capacity to carry this out would also be dependent on the mix of skills found within the organisation. It can be assumed that community groups are likely to have greater capacity than individual landowners to apply for a greater number of funds, and 21% (a total of 45 groups) made more than six applications for funding in a typical year, with 6% making more than 11 applications (Figure 4).

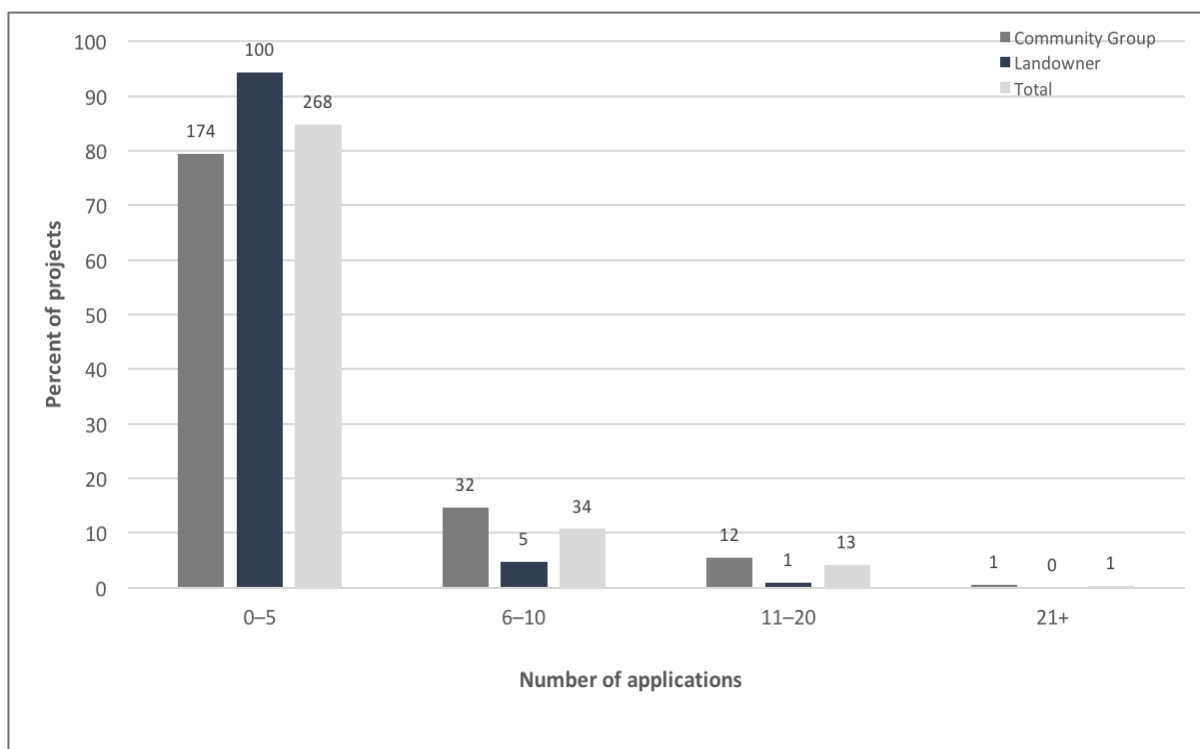


Figure 4: Number of funding applications made per year for community group projects (n=219), landowner projects (n = 106), and total number of survey respondents (n = 316). *The number of projects within each application range is shown above the bars for each category.*

How successful are applications for funding?

The survey indicates that it was common for respondents to experience success for less than 25% of their applications; with this being the case for 32% community groups and 62% of landowners (Figure 5). A further 10% of total responses indicated that between 25–50% of applications are successful in a typical year. At the other end of the scale, 42% of community groups indicated that more than 75% of their applications were successful in a typical year, as did 26% of landowners (Figure 5).

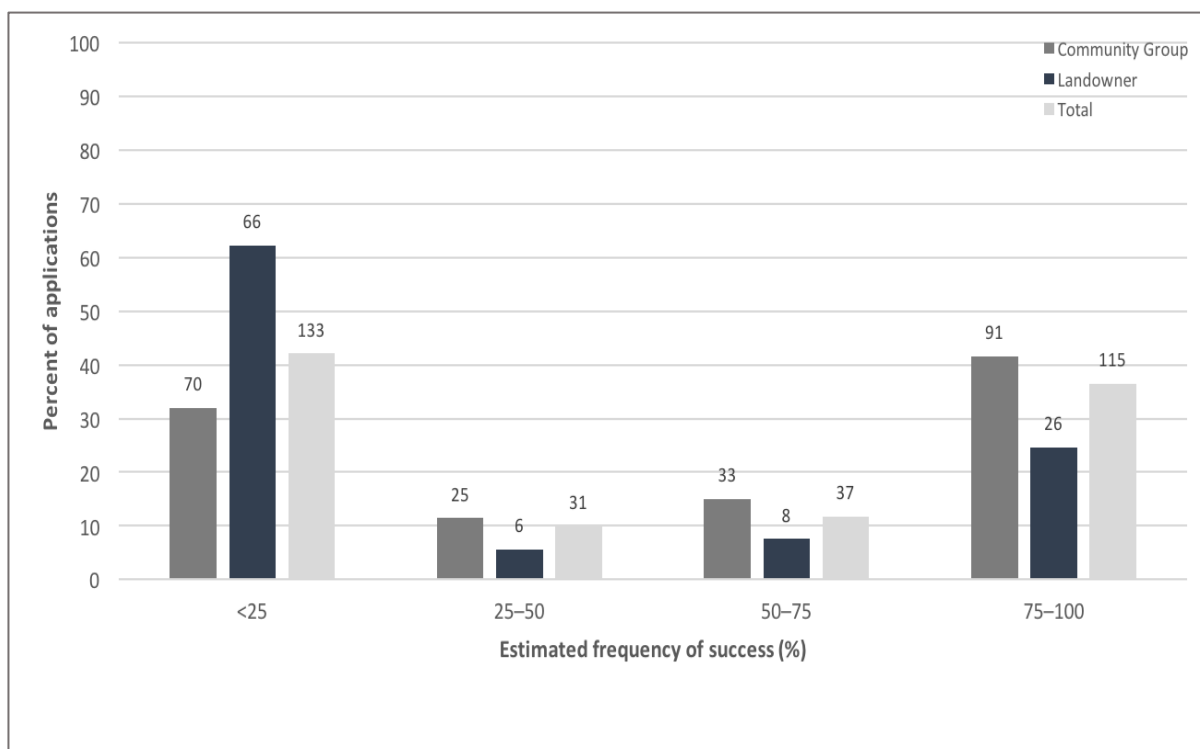


Figure 5: Estimated frequency of success in obtain funding for community groups (n=219), landowners (n = 106), and total number of survey respondents (n = 316). *The number of responses within each frequency range is shown above the bars for each category.*

Are conservation projects typically supported by more than one avenue of funding?

Most of the responses to the survey indicated that conservation projects had five or fewer funders; with this being the case for 83% of community group projects, 97% of landowner projects, and 87% of total responses (Figure 6). Four (2%) community group projects were funded by more than 21 different funding sources, 35 (16%) of community group projects relied on between five and 20 different sources of funding, while only 3 (3%) of landowner projects relied on greater than five funding sources (Figure 6).

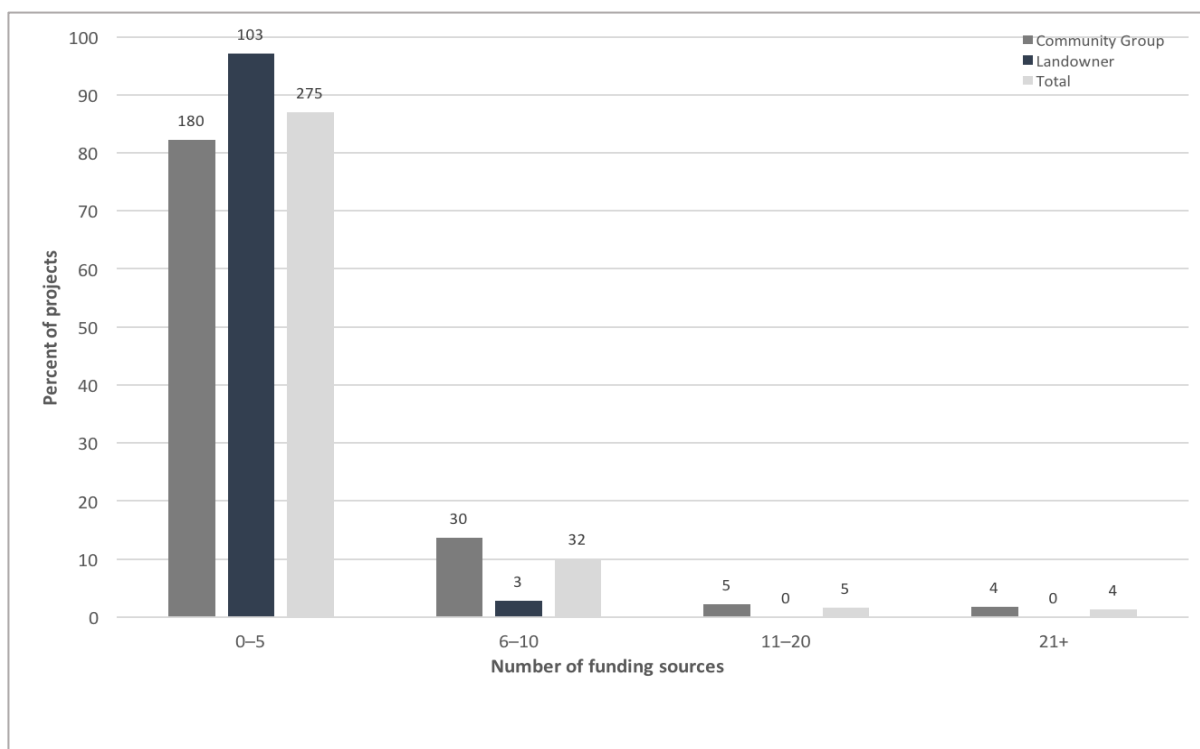


Figure 6: Number of funding sources associated with community group projects (n=219), landowner projects (n = 106), and total number of survey respondents (n = 316). *The number of projects within each range is shown above the bars for each category.*

What is the level of happiness associated with the efforts taken to source funding?

The survey attempted to determine if the administration load (hours per month) was commensurate to the amount of funding received (total dollars per year). Although the survey results indicate that projects that received a smaller amount of total funding had a smaller associated administration load, the data collected is not robust enough to draw any firm conclusions.

In addition, the survey responses indicated the level of happiness experienced by respondents in relation to the effort spent on sourcing funding ranged across the spectrum (from very unhappy to very happy), and that this was relatively uniform between community groups and landowners. Just over a third (34% of community groups and 33% of landowners) think the effort for payoff is ‘about right’ (Figure 7). Eleven percent of community groups and 10% of landowners are ‘very happy’ with their current situation, while 12% of community groups and 29% of landowners are ‘very unhappy’ (Figure 7).

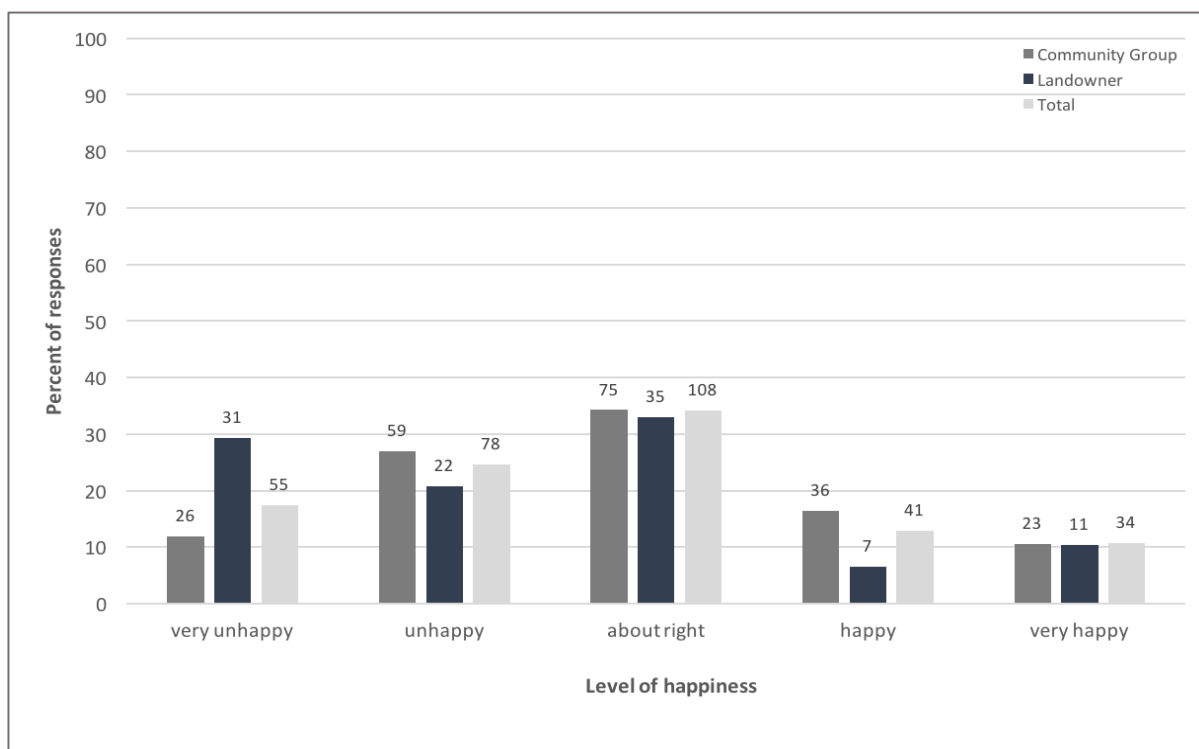


Figure 7: Level of happiness experienced by respondents regards the amount of funding raised compared with the associated effort as indicated by community groups (n = 219), landowners (n = 106), and total respondents (n = 316). Categories of ‘happiness’ were defined as: *very unhappy, such a lot of effort and very little money raised; unhappy, lots of effort is expended and we still struggle to cover the basics; about right, the level of funding received is about right considering the time we put into it; happy, it is a fair workload and we are generally pleased with our success at attracting funding; very happy, the hours spent are worthwhile and we are successful at fundraising.* The number of responses for each level of happiness is shown above the bars for each category.

What is the nature of the relationship between funders and applicants?

Most respondents described their relationship with their current funders as ‘constructive’ (19% of total respondents); ‘good’ (30% of total respondents); or ‘very positive’ (36% of total respondents) (Figure 8). At the other end of the spectrum, 15% of landowners, and 4% of community groups reported ‘serious concerns’ with their current funders, and 11% of landowners and 5% of community groups described the relationship as ‘strained’ (Figure 8).

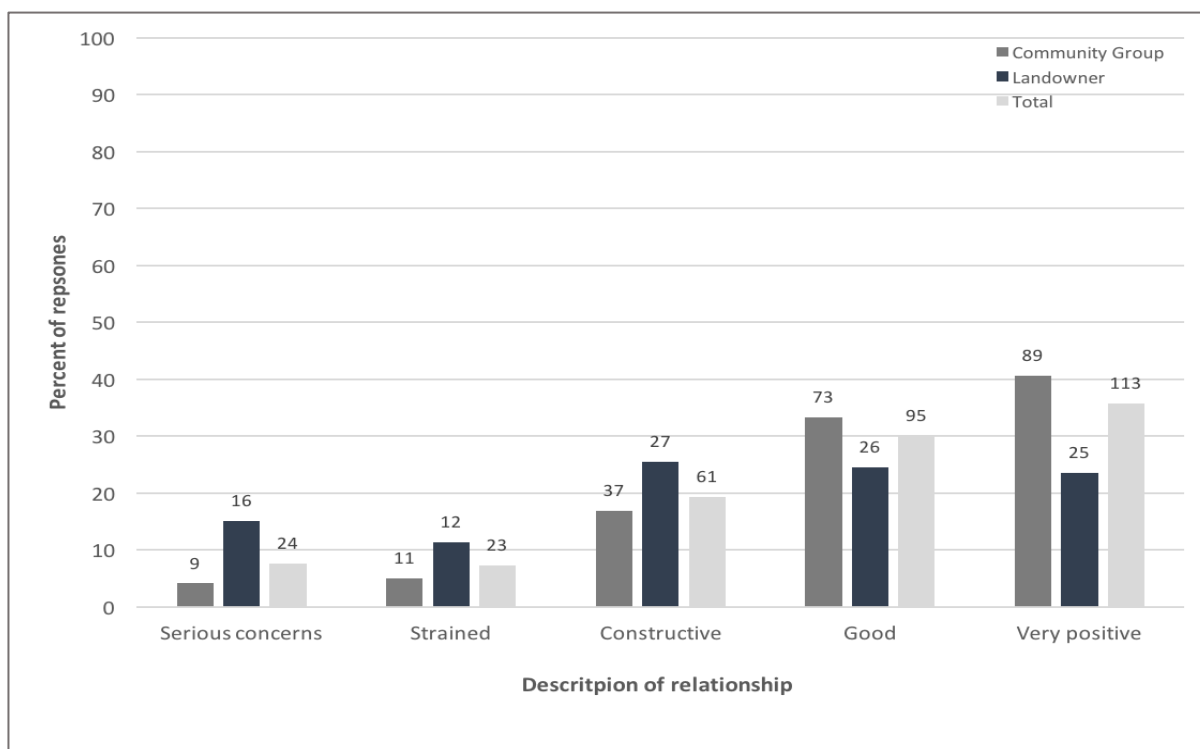


Figure 8: Description of relationship between funding sources and applicants as described by community groups (n = 219), landowners (n = 106), and total respondents (n = 316). *The number of responses for each relationship descriptor is shown above the bars for each category.*

Some community groups and landowners receive very small, one-off funding while others cultivate enduring funding relationships with one or more funders over many years. Some orchestrate a mixture of both. Each relationship will be born of circumstance and many factors will affect the nature of that connection.

What is the level of satisfaction with the current funding situation for community conservation?

Sixty-three percent of community groups and 72% of landowners were ‘partly’ or ‘not at all satisfied’ (Figure 9). At the other end of the spectrum, 5% of community groups and 8% of landowners were ‘very satisfied’; and 7% of community groups but only 1% of landowners were ‘more than satisfied’.

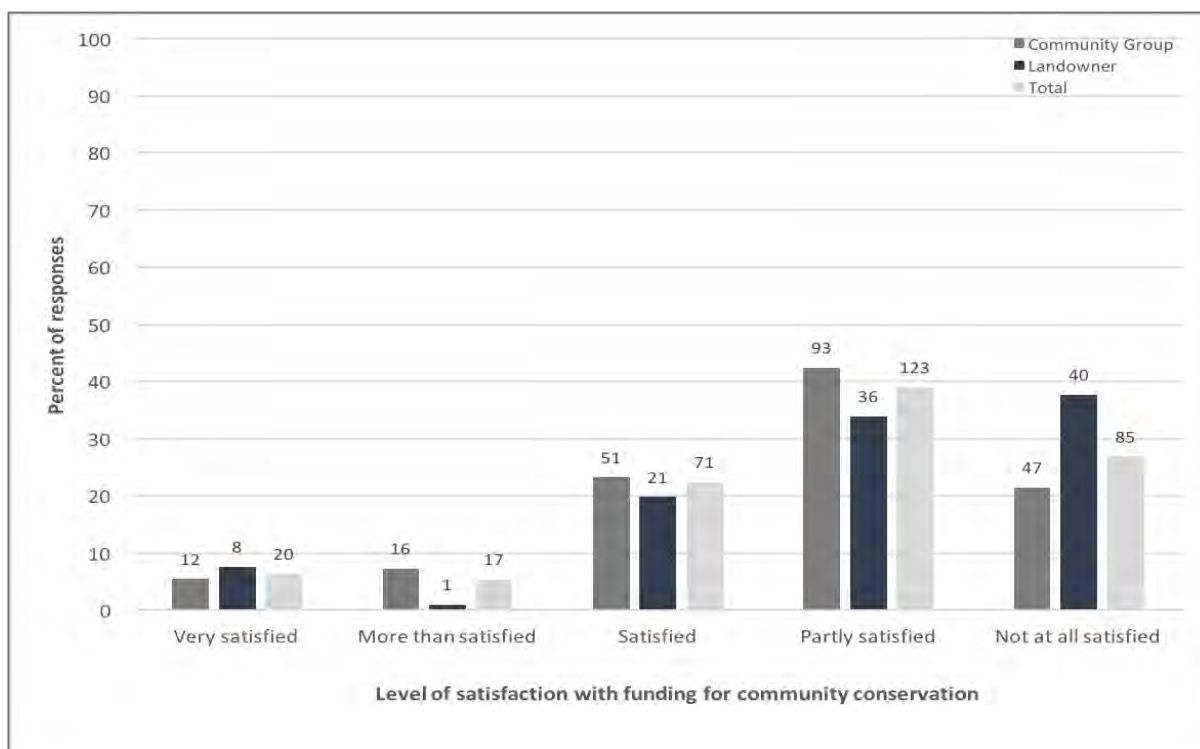


Figure 9: Level of satisfaction with the current funding situation for community conservation as expressed by community groups (n = 219), landowners (n = 106), and total respondents (n = 316). *The number of responses for each level of satisfaction is shown above the bars for each category.*

What is needed to improve funding of community conservation?

Most of the survey respondents identified several issues associated with the funding of community conservation and provided suggestions for improving the situation. These suggestions have been summarised by theme (Table 3). Of the five thematic areas identified for improvement, the need to improve the allocation of funding was given the most emphasis, with 40% of community group responses, and 35% of landowner responses falling into this theme. The second-most identified area for improvement was the need for more funding, with 16% of community group responses and 22% of landowner responses falling into this theme.

Table 3: Percent of community group (n= 243) and landowner (n = 140) responses falling within each theme for improving funding of community conservation. *Commonly raised issues associated with each theme are provided in italics.*

Theme	Percent of community group suggestions (# in brackets)	Percent of landowner suggestions (# in brackets)
No suggestion provided	30 (66)	35 (37)
Greater practical support for community conservation	15 (33)	18 (19)
Greater funding for community conservation	16 (34)	22 (23)
Assistance with finding where to apply for funding	6 (14)	15 (16)
Improve funding of conservation agencies and reduce reliance on community groups <i>'Engagement' is code for conservation agencies taking credit for community efforts</i> <i>Poor funding of conservation agencies places increased pressure on community conservation</i>	4 (9)	8 (8)
Improve allocation of existing funding <i>Difficulties of upscaling in the absence of paid staff</i> <i>Difficulties in funding administrative costs</i>	40 (87)	35 (37)

How well is the community conservation sector operating?

The most common response to this question was that the sector 'needs work', with 40% of both community groups and landowners indicating this to be their perception (Figure 10), and a further 11% of community group and 22% of landowner responses indicating they had 'serious concerns' with the operation of the community conservation sector. Twenty-one percent of community groups, but only 5% of landowners felt the sector was operating 'well', while 4% of community groups but 13% of landowners felt the sector was operating 'very well'. Community groups appear to have a broader spread of perceptions regards the operation of the sector than landowners, with most landowners expressing an average or poorer view of the sector.

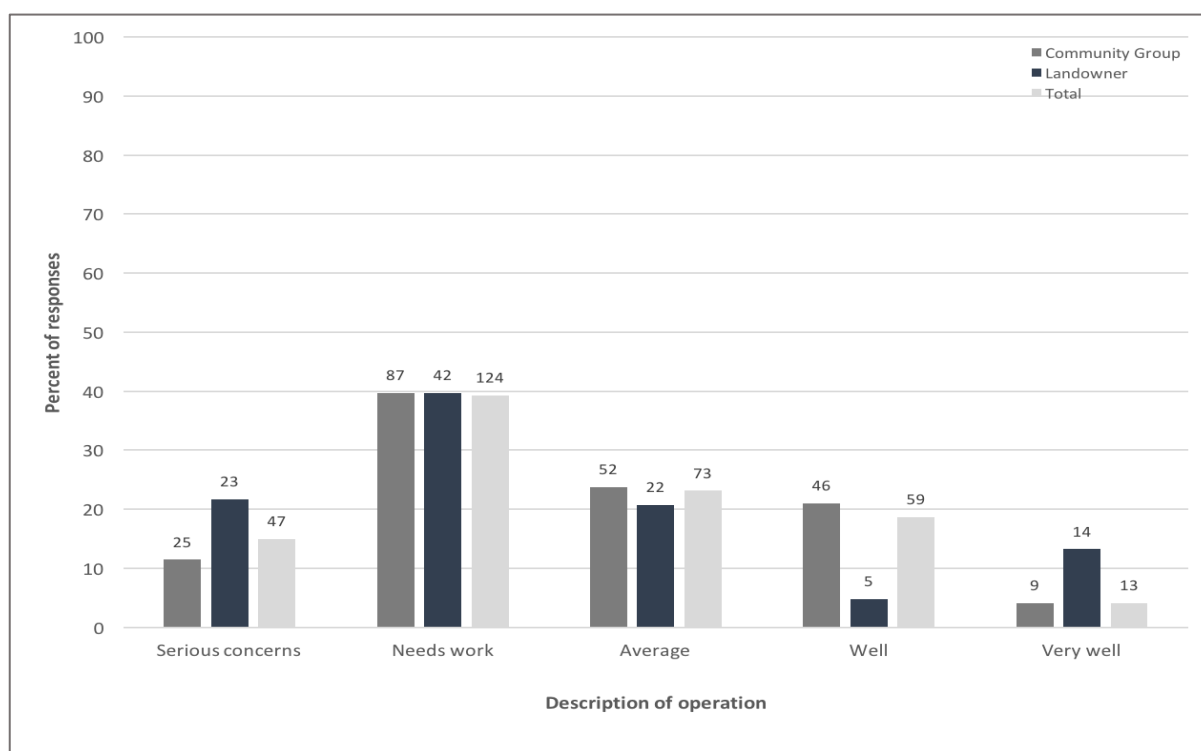


Figure 10: Description of how well the community conservation sector is operating by percent of responses from community groups (n = 219), landowners (n = 106), and total respondents (n = 316). Number of respondents for each description of operation are shown above the bars for each category.

What is needed to improve the way the community conservation sector operates?

The emerging themes identified by respondents in suggesting improvements to the way in which the community conservation sector operates is very similar to those identified when focussing on required improvements to funding the sector. However, when thinking more generally about the operation of the sector additional themes emerged, including engagement and education, identified by 20% of community group and 6% of landowners as a key area for improvement; and improved coordination and recognition, identified by 28% of community group and 19% of landowners (Table 4). Many community groups expressed an awareness that succession is a key issue, particularly so when their primary effort is in predator or pest plant control and gains can be quickly lost. The need to address this issue is reflected in the additional themes identified here, particularly the need to engage the public and educate them more effectively to increase the people involved in community conservation now and in the long term.

The need for practical assistance for community conservation proponents again emerged strongly as a theme (30% of community group and 24% of landowner responses, Table 4). The need for greater funding was again not as prominent as might be expected, although more funding is likely necessary to address many of the issues identified. Further, the similarity of themes raised in relation to funding specifically and operation of the sector generally, suggests that respondents of the survey consider the funding of the sector and the operation of the sector to be closely entwined.

Table 4: Percent of community group (n= 338) and landowner (n = 121) responses falling within each theme for improving the operation of the community conservation sector.

Theme	Percent of community group suggestions (# in brackets)	Percent of landowner suggestions (# in brackets)
No suggestion provided	23 (52)	32 (34)
Greater practical support for community conservation	30 (66)	24 (25)
Greater funding for community conservation	9 (20)	8 (9)
Assistance with finding where to apply for funding	11 (24)	6 (6)
Improve funding of conservation agencies and reduce reliance on community groups	12 (26)	8 (9)
Improve allocation of existing funding	21 (46)	11 (12)
Engagement and education	20 (43)	6 (6)
Improved coordination and recognition	28 (61)	19 (20)

Part V Identifying the key issues and a way forward

Conservation in New Zealand is at a crossroads. A gradual withdrawal of state influence from the protection of the environment is at the core of the opaque context for community conservation. Reduced relative effort from government has also at times resulted in the ‘tail wagging the dog’. Thus, the key issue in community conservation – and indeed conservation more widely – is a lack of leadership and strategy. While it is certain that stronger engagement of communities in conservation is a positive shift, suggestions that government effort is not needed or ‘in the way’ have been prevalent yet find little support in empirical evidence and may be material in reducing the political strength of conservation agencies and conservation overall.

Community conservation is not a substitute for well-resourced core conservation (Brown et al, 2015), nor is philanthropy and corporate sponsorship a surrogate for government contributions to resourcing conservation (Norton et al, 2016). There is ample reason to be sceptical of the ecological contribution of some community conservation activities to biodiversity protection in New Zealand. For those efforts that do yield ecological outcomes, empirical evidence demonstrating that change is sparse. Philanthropy and corporate sponsorship are also important, but highly volatile bases upon which to construct a system to safeguard natural heritage.

The research demonstrated some positive aspects that should be celebrated:

- A growing appreciation for the role of community conservation among public agencies
- Rising incidence of multi-party collaborative models in conservation
- Strong regional support for community conservation in most part of the country
- Increasing diversity in the way conservation is funded
- Powerful players emerging to catalyse community action (e.g. PFNZ)

Notable too, is the appetite for improvement and innovation in the sector. But despite these positive moves, several key issues remain. Most issues are outside the ability of any one group to solve: they are systemic and rely on the efforts of many players to ultimately resolve. This section summarises the key issues from the three sources of information; the literature review, the survey and the interviews.

A place to stand, and a voice

Most clear from all three information sources is that community conservation is struggling to find its place because of a lack of leadership and unclear strategy behind conservation overall. There is a lack of explicit recognition of community conservation in what plans or programmes exist at a national scale, and variable integration at regional levels. The need for clear objectives in conservation is evident throughout the literature, and failure practically certain in its absence (Johnson and Wouter, 2008). This is also reflected

in the international literature, which notes that well-planned initiatives can counter prevailing negative influences such as patchy engagement or corruption (Brooks et al, 2013).

So, what should the place of community conservation be?

Community conservation usually cannot do the same things as agencies. This is not a criticism, more a statement that (typically) small, community led initiatives simply struggle to achieve the scale and longevity of government initiatives, and to do so with adequate funding certainty or technical support. It is critical to be mindful of this limitation, but there are clear signs that the realistic capacity of community conservation is often only weakly understood or appreciated. On the other hand, agencies cannot always achieve what community conservation initiatives can, particularly from a social perspective. Community conservation appears disparate and voiceless, facing warring expectations and lacking cohesive representation.

A lack of institutional recognition of community conservation means an opportunity lost to build support for the protection of our biological heritage in a way that is effective and long-lasting. The present 'scaffolding' for the sector would seem far from adequate. Survey respondents seemed to recognise that they needed much more practical support with how to actually 'do' conservation, and agency staff commonly noted the significant burden that exists in supporting organisations. An institution that expressly supports community conservation would be able to help marshal resources, provide support in key common areas and demonstrate innovations and outcomes at a sector level.

Appropriate resourcing and ways to obtain it

Survey respondents, key informant interviews and the literature review all revealed that community conservation is encountering a wide range of resource challenges. Many of them sheet back to a lack of clear context and a lack of appropriate support (see above), but others relate to the way funding is administered. This appears to be partly a result of poor capacity in some parts of the sector (i.e. difficulty understanding funding requirements), and partly a result of barriers put in place by the funders intentionally or otherwise.

Respondents raised issues including that funding is hard to find and access, the applications can be long and repetitive, and the chances of success can be very low or not clearly communicated (meaning effort is expended where chances are very slim). Table 5 sets out, based on the many vexations aired, some of the key issues that fund applicants raised and why they matter. Unreasonably complex or unfairly dogmatic funding processes can seriously affect the energy and goodwill of the community conservation sector and result in many groups or individuals simply giving up.

Table 5: Assessment of the key concerns raised in this research and why they matter

Characteristic and description	Why it matters
Proportional accountability Application process and reporting requirements should be proportional to size of fund.	Applicants applying for small amounts of money do not need to expend significant resources filling out forms and preparing reports, while recipients of large sums of money are appropriately accountable. Transaction costs are reasonable, and value can be demonstrated.
Online form submission Applications and reports for funding can be submitted online to funders for processing.	Reduces paperwork and may speed up some aspects of processing and monitoring. May enable reporting at a greater scale due to easier access to data.
Guidance for applicants Guidance in the form of advice or a document is available to applicants to answer FAQs	Applicants can access important information easily and submitted forms may be more accurate. The 'transactional communications' burden for the agency in providing guidance and clarification on a reactive basis will reduce.
Proportional outcome monitoring Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes is appropriately framed and resourced.	Monitoring will be enshrined as a core aspect of an application and groups will need to have, engage or be provided with assistance to meet these expectations. This will enable community conservation to better demonstrate outcomes at a project, landscape and sector level.
Multiyear funding Provision for funding to extend over multiple years	Long term funding changes decisions that groups and individuals make and provides greater security for participants. Multiyear funding also reduces the administrative burden on groups and funders alike, although should not reduce appropriate accountability.
Rewarding success Arbitrary time limits on funding are disestablished to enable successful groups to receive repeat support.	Recipients of funding that demonstrate a strong track record of delivery can access ongoing support and are not cut off, resulting in loss of some or all of the conservation gains realised through their efforts.

Many funders that contribute to environmental causes do so to only a minor degree, or as a minor component of their overall giving. Others are more prolific, such as the Tindall Foundation (a fund that has distributed \$135 million since 1995, and average of \$10 m a year currently across all sectors, of which

18% is tagged for environmental purposes). The recognition of the environmental sector as being a minor destination for funding has a practical implication. Desires by the sector to have unified funding deadlines, common forms and integrated objectives are unlikely to be met because standardisation is not justified for a small proportion of recipients. This means that improvements in environmental funding processes may rely more on the demand side than the supply side altering their approaches, at least in the short term.

In addition to standard models of fund distribution, there is an appetite for innovation in funding. Many survey respondents were clearly fatigued about the constant struggle to find resources for their activities, and several key informants noted that the traditional funding model may not be where the future lies. More and more, community conservation needs to embrace innovative funding models. Internationally and domestically, the opportunities for innovative financing of conservation are growing.

The World Resources Institute has developed an initiative called the ‘New Restoration Economy’ (NRE), a scoping exercise with three key pillars;

Business: *NRE is identifying the business models that can enable restoration enterprises—both large and small—to scale. We are focused on innovative models that are profitable and impactful.*

Finance: *NRE is growing private investment in restoration by fostering a pipeline of investable projects, expanding the investor base, and researching financial mechanisms that can support restoration.*

Economics & Policy: *NRE is quantifying the employment and economic output generated by restoration in Brazil and Kenya. These analyses are important to mobilize support from governments.* (<http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/new-restoration-economy>)

It is likely that such an analysis in New Zealand of the potential of non-government funds to finance conservation here would be instructive. At a practical level however, locked in a grant-based cycle, groups and individuals don’t know where to start at breaking the funding mould. There is a need for strategic and financial advice for groups and landowners to enable them to raise funding more quickly, more successfully and in more diverse ways. There is also a need for practical financial and administrative mentoring to be put in place.

Many funders and other experts noted that there is a sense of frustration in the sector that can come across negatively to funders and external supporters. Many of those interviewed had anecdotes to share of particularly affronting communications by some groups, with one referring to the behaviour as being reminiscent of ‘tiny empires’ driven by a sense of entitlement to assistance without sufficient perspective as to the relative value of their contribution compared to any others. Several further identified that this characteristic is particularly evident in the conservation sector over other sectors that are also funded (e.g. education, faith-based, social services).

It seems sensible that where efficiencies in operations can be made, that the difference to the day to day interface between funders and the funded might well be worth it for all involved. It is likely that compulsion to improve funding processes will be difficult to motivate in some parts of the sector. Public agencies however may be more easily reached and should perhaps be the first port of call, with philanthropists and corporate funders potentially following suit in the future. Further, establishing a basis for resource allocation grounded in conservation priority would help rank importance of contributions in an evidential way.

Scattered effort and weak alignment with conservation need

The total number of community conservation projects nationwide is unknown. While some estimates exist, and initiatives such as PFNZ's 'heat map'¹² demonstrate the geographic patterns of activity for predator control, there is still uncertainty. What we do know is that most projects are very small and that many are not linked to similar projects operating nearby for a variety of reasons. This plethora of small and disconnected efforts has strategic implications. It means a significant amount of effort is being expended that may not need to be. Long term sustainability simply isn't found in a milieu of diffuse and disjunct effort. To achieve scale, community conservation must integrate its efforts where possible.

But people are uniquely connected to place, and where they work and what they do are not easy to adjust or govern. This is particularly true for landowners, iwi-led conservation projects and groups formed to address local issues. Strategies to shift and integrate effort to enhance the contribution to conservation must be mindful of the fact that the social context for conservation may relegate conservation need to be a relatively minor consideration for the group or individual overall. However, such a consideration is important for the allocation of support and funding. Public agencies dispense funding for activities that align with their statutory objectives. Given the limited public conservation funding in New Zealand and the dire state of biodiversity, public funding of community conservation must align more closely with conservation need.

Unclear outcomes

The ecological outcomes of community conservation are often poor or may not be known due to a lack of monitoring. This issue was raised by most interviewees yet only by a small number of survey respondents. What this suggests is that the effectiveness of community conservationists is either not known or not recognised by outside observers, and either assumed to be significant or not seen as important to

¹² PFNZ Trust provides an online gateway for predator control groups to plot their efforts on a national map, accessible at <https://predatorfreenz.org/tools-resources/national-map/>

demonstrate by proponents. For many projects, the social benefits of the project may be clear but the ecological value questionable.

There are few drivers to gain clarity on the outcomes of community conservation efforts, however, because funders rarely ask to know the difference made to the environment of group's efforts and it can be hard to assess the relative value of groups where information on outcomes is present but patchy or absent entirely. Community conservation may also struggle to find appropriate ways to monitor outcomes at a way and a scale that matches their capabilities and to direct volunteer effort to carry out this task over others.

There is a need for funders to work to requiring the demonstration of outcomes to receive and validate funding and to report on the ecological outcomes of the funds they dispense noting that this is likely to be more important for public agencies than corporate sponsors or philanthropic entities) Community groups can receive substantial amounts of public money and we should see conservation gains for that money to justify the public investment (where it comes from conservation sources). At present, the value is unclear at a sector level. Further, where outcomes are demonstrated to be predominantly social rather than ecological, a withdrawal of public funding may be appropriate, enabling it to be re-deployed to more urgent tasks.

Summary

This report initially intended to focus primarily on the funding arrangements for community conservation, but by necessity the scope has expanded. It is recognised that before funding comes structure and before structure comes strategy. The allocation of resources follows strategy and structure; where these are unclear so too are the funding models and clarity about who pays the bill. When framed in this way, the vexations of community conservation around funding can be cast more as symptoms than problems in and of themselves – and thus more easily solved by addressing issues at a larger scale.

In summary, community conservation is growing and outgrowing the institutional support presently available. Its role is unclear, and expectations of its ability to deliver often unrealistic. A coherent strategic context for community conservation is vital to enable it to operate more effectively alongside agencies and other proponents. Improved funding practices would help to alleviate the day to day burden but cannot be at the expense of reasonable accountability nor significantly drain the resources of supporting agencies. Further mentoring in specific areas will enable community conservation to 'level up', and that must include efforts to focus and demonstrate outcomes, particularly where public investment is made.

Part VI Recommendations



Community conservation is at a cross-roads. It has outgrown its boots and outgrown the institutions that provide support because it is operating at a greater scale and density. This evolving context demands different arrangements. This section sets out the key recommendations considering the four key issues identified in the previous section (see diagram), which are to:

Establish a national and regionally-linked institution that will provide visibility, strategic advice and practical support to community conservationists including landowners.

Develop a national strategic conservation plan to coalesce and prioritise conservation effort

Align public funding of conservation activities with conservation need, to maximise the difference made by that investment.

Enhance the funding system by reorienting allocation and distribution to focus more stringently on outcomes and streamline processes to reduce transaction costs while enhancing accountability for outcomes.

It is important to note the interactions between the solutions. Addressing the solutions that combat strategic issues (i.e. opaque roles, lack of leadership, absence of evidence-based prioritisation) will have greater impact on the context than smaller changes (aligning funding timelines or improving reporting). If all the energy of implementation is channelled into the comparatively minor issues, far less change and improvement to the system overall will be generated for effort expended. Conversely, if strategic issues are the focus of efforts, they may cause the smaller changes to be easier or perhaps even less necessary. An integrated approach to implementing these recommendations is recommended as a result.

Recommendation 1

Establish a national and regionally-linked institution that will provide visibility, strategic advice and practical support to community conservationists including landowners.

Suggested solution

Establish national and regional institutional recognition for community conservation, to support collaboration between groups, provide technical and strategic support and advocate for the sector on matters of finance etc, education and support funders on establishing needs. The 'regional hub' proposal from the PCE is seconded by this research, but with a suggestion of a central core to provide extra support at a national scale. At present there is no unified voice for the community conservation sector.

The national entity should be tightly linked with regional representation. The national entity could take charge of matters best addressed at a national scale, including;

- advocacy for community conservation interests in central government and other national scale processes
- Development of templates and systems to raise funding for conservation and providing other financial mentoring.
- research and development of new engagement, management and monitoring techniques
- Development of nationally consistent standards
- Conduit between organisations and within processes commonly encountered by voluntary groups (Charities Commission etc)

Recommendation 2

Develop a national strategic conservation plan to coalesce and prioritise conservation effort.

Suggested solution

The Department of Conservation and regional councils should develop – along with Treaty partners - a far more coherent and evidence-based strategic plan for conservation than presently exists at a national scale, to form a solid basis for the distribution of funding (among other things). The development of such a strategy should offer the opportunity for input by landowners and community groups and all relevant stakeholders.

The purpose of the strategic plan would be to set a course (hopefully tender neutral) for conservation overall, thus making it possible for the likes of the community conservation sector to determine its role and goals for the coming decades and for resources to be apportioned in line with clearly established

roles and responsibilities. It should be available to external proponents to use (such as by philanthropic bodies as a decision support tool for fund allocation).

The strategy should tease apart the elements that would naturally be the domain of DOC (management of backcountry sites and PCL generally), roles that fall naturally within that of a regional and local council (biodiversity on private land) and then make clear and explicit provision for the contribution of community conservation as a complement to those efforts.

Innovative approaches to conservation management could also look to support communities to take on roles that might be traditionally the domain of agencies but which they are unable to do (Norton et al, 2016). Examples include the protection of threatened species near places of settlement with a strong and engaged community, where actions are of conservation importance but – due to resource constraints – they do not presently meet criteria to be funded core activities for the Department of Conservation. An example of this is the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust in Otago.

Recommendation 3

Align public funding of conservation activities with conservation need, to maximise the difference made by that investment.

In a resource-constrained environment like conservation, the best marginal gains are made by focusing on the most urgent tasks where the most difference can be made. Not all our public agencies or much community conservation activity use evidence-based prioritisation to direct their energies. Enshrining prioritisation for both agency and non-agency conservation (where possible) would enable what resources that are available to make the most impact they can.

Community conservation is inherently self-organising and attempts to govern where groups and individuals operate is likely to alienate effort. However, public agencies have specific mandates to carry out conservation, and ecological outcomes should necessarily be demonstrated where they are contributing financially to the community conservation project in question.

Aligning public conservation funding with conservation priority means groups and individuals will be encouraged to work in areas and on issues of highest importance, thus potentially increasing their marginal contribution to conservation and the public value of the investment.

Funding agencies may choose to tier their support based on conservation priority in the first instance but retain flexibility for where unusual circumstances arise. Funders be reluctant to forgo their discretion (particularly at a political level) so may require external pressure to enact such a policy. Where an express statutory mandate exists to carry out conservation this reorientation is much more

necessary (i.e. DOC and councils) although philanthropic and corporate sponsors may adopt all or some of the approach to enhance their social license to operate and overall outcomes.

Recommendation 4

Enhance the funding system by reorienting allocation and distribution to focus more stringently on outcomes and streamline processes to reduce transaction costs while enhancing accountability for outcomes.

Reorient the funding system to focus more stringently on outcomes and streamline processes to reduce transaction costs while enhancing accountability for outcomes. There is a plethora of ways to enhance the way funding is allocated. The effort required to implement suggested improvements will vary from funder to funder, depending on their current practice.

It is recognised that corporate sponsorship and philanthropy are self-managing and are under no obligation and have limited drivers to improve their processes where those processes are lacking, thus their participation is entirely discretionary. However, for public funders however, there is a clear justification to improve practice and reduce particularly agency-base transaction costs.

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Appendix

Question	Critical Review
1. Are you completing this survey as: (a) as a landowner undertaking restoration on your own land; or (b) on behalf of a community group	No issues. The option was available to select both to reflect where one person is involved in more than one organisation, or where a landowner has a group of volunteers that assist with a project on their land.
2. If you are completing this on behalf of a community group, what is the name of your group?	The purpose of this question was to ensure there were not too many double-up responses. It could be left blank, indicating that some groups are not formalised to the extent that they have a name.
3. Please identify the region that your conservation project is operating in?	For groups operating at a national scale, this would have been a difficult question to answer. However, only one group notified this as an issue. Other question responses reflected a good national coverage.
4. How long has the conservation project been running?	The purpose of this question was to determine the 'vintage' of the respondents, to ultimately determine if there is a difference between relatively new groups and landowner's experiences and those that are more established. An error was made whereby a category was excluded (16-20 years), however the analysis clumped all responses of more than 11 years to address this.
5. In a typical year, how much funding does this project receive? (\$0-4999, \$5000-24,999, \$25000-\$99999, \$100K+)	The purpose of this question was to determine the scale of project being discussed. The 'received' monies could also include projects privately-funded by landowners. The responses provided a useful indicator of the scale of financial need out there.
6. From the following list what are the TWO most common activities funding is received for (please select two)	The purpose of this question was to determine where – at a sector level – the majority of funds are destined to be used (i.e. for what activity).

Question	Critical Review
<p>7. <i>In a typical year, how many funding applications would you submit?</i></p>	<p>The purpose of this question was to understand the sector-scale degree of workload for funding. Some respondents contacted us, concerned that there was not a 'N/A' option for those that did not submit applications (either because they had no need for money or self-funded). The category of '0-5' covered where no applications were submitted, however on reflection a 'N/A' option would have been useful in demarcating this group more effectively.</p>
<p>8. <i>In a typical year, what percentage of funding applications are successful?</i></p>	<p>As above, an 'N/A' option might have been helpful, despite the 'under 25%' category catering for zero as well.</p>
<p>9. <i>How many funders are currently supporting this project?</i></p>	<p>As above.</p> <p>This question was designed differently to those above, which were based on a 'typical year' to reflect the ongoing burden. Instead, it asked for a moment in time figure of support, to reflect the very dynamic funding context for community conservation.</p>
<p>10. <i>On average, how many hours are spent on administration per month (by your organisation)?</i></p> <p>a) <i>How many of those hours are spent applying for funding?</i></p> <p>b) <i>How many of those hours are spent writing reports to funders?</i></p>	<p>Concerns raised nationwide about the administrative burden groups and landowners are under when coordinating conservation activities are long-running. The purpose of this question was to attempt to quantify this burden in hours. 'By your organisation' was bracketed to indicate it would not always apply.</p> <p>The second part of the question aimed to determine the proportion of that administrative burden, by asking how many of the hours were spent on funding and how many on reporting.</p> <p>In general, this question was not well-answered, and many responses had to be excluded, in addition to those that answered 'zero' simply being removed from the analysis. It is possible that the question was not</p>

Question	Critical Review
	explained clearly enough, although much effort went in to making it as simple and straightforward as possible.
11. <i>How happy are you with the amount of funding raised compared with the effort it takes to fundraise?</i>	<p>This question was designed to provide categorical responses that reflected a spectrum of opinions. Categories were chosen to reduce the analytical burden, and the language style was informal, so the meaning was clear to all. One respondent expressed frustration that they would have worded it differently, but otherwise responses were generally straightforward.</p>
12. <i>How would you rate your relationship overall with your current funders?</i>	<p>The purpose of this rating was to understand the current state of relationships between the sector and those resourcing their activities. For those receiving no external funding, and/or self-funding this question was not particularly relevant and a 'N/A' option would have been helpful, or a non-mandatory response option.</p> <p>A few noted in the open-ended responses later what they had done in lieu of not answering (e.g. 'I don't have any funders, so I chose the most neutral response'). However, the prior responses were left as is, because they were likely inconsequential in context.</p> <p>A couple of respondents noted that their relationships with their funders were very different, so an 'overall' determination was difficult to determine. This is understood, but the overall request was to make the data manageable at scale, and as such will not take full account of the nuances of particular relationships.</p>
13. <i>How satisfied is your organisation with the current funding situation for community conservation?</i>	Like Question 11, this question provided respondents an opportunity to select a category.
14. <i>Do you have any ideas on how to improve funding of community groups and landowners undertaking conservation?</i>	The purpose of this free-text question was to provide ample space for the community conservation sector to offer specific views and ideas. A great many astute

Question	Critical Review
	<p>observations and ideas from these responses will significantly enrich the later analysis.</p> <p>As with any public survey, a small number unfortunately used it as a forum to deliver denigrating messages. Where such notes raised specific issues about the survey, they were taken on board – but otherwise they were ignored.</p>
15. <i>How well do you think community conservation as a sector is operating?</i>	This category-based primer aimed to glean a rough view of the grassroots perceptions of the sector's state of play.
16. <i>Do you have any ideas on how to improve the way community conservation operates?</i>	<p>As with question 14, ample opportunity was provided for individual views to be expressed. A rich collection of ideas was amassed that will add immense value to the research report.</p> <p>Again, some used it as a forum to provide critical comments of the survey, the organisation, the researcher or named persons within PFNZ, but the same treatment was given as above. If they related to fair points, they were considered in the analysis. The rare one that was abusive, or denigrating was simply ignored.</p>