

MĀTAKI

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EMPOWERING ACTION

Improving funding and support for
community conservation in Aotearoa

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Foreword

Aotearoa New Zealand is highly reliant on community-based nature conservation. Tens of thousands of hours are put in by volunteers – or people working on shoestring budgets – to protect and restore biodiversity. Community-based conservation has been a powerful catalyst for individual to landscape-scale change in Aotearoa. It's important work for our future, and it's a growing movement. It has real potential to shift the dial – actions matter, and the narratives we weave around these efforts inspire others to work collaboratively to create impact on the ground.

Community-based conservation groups are diverse. They do pest animal and plant control, ecological monitoring, and threatened species management. They run education programmes, are the eyes and ears for environmental enforcement agencies, collect citizen science data, provide visitor infrastructure, and empower and train others. The diversity of this sector, its energy, expanding expertise, and growing number of endeavours is incredible.

In spite of growing enthusiasm and on-ground effort, current support for community conservation isn't working. We need to better understand how best to fund and support community initiatives to ensure their effective contribution and ongoing participation, and to grow the movement. To that end, the Trust is delighted to present this report to you. It's the third in a series aimed at unpacking key issues facing this important sector.

There is new context to consider from the 6 years since the original report. The Covid years saw people reconnect to their local places; the investment and then cessation of Jobs for Nature; a constrained funding environment; and a tough economic climate driving a reduction in financial and in-kind support. There is heavy reliance on volunteers, scant funding, and haphazard organisation of many of the players. Such barriers constrain the sector's ability to amplify and consolidate its efforts to create enduring outcomes for people and places.

Yet at the same time, community-based conservation is growing. Communities have many ideas and are often first to innovate. While this report explores community conservation more generally, a key driver of growth in the sector is the Predator Free movement. Predator Free has enabled people to rally around a goal, deploying practical tools and actions to protect biodiversity. As Chair and CE of the Trust, ensuring that we understand how best to support such work is vital for us.

Our intention in commissioning Dr Doole's work was to revisit our understanding of what communities are doing; to identify their needs; and to better appreciate the types of funding and support they need to be effective. In short: to inspire, enable and advocate for community-based nature conservation. If we don't listen to the sectors we're aiming to support, and work with them, we won't be able to bring about the change we need.

The survey and interviews that underpin this research identified many potential improvements, with practical recommendations for funders and agencies to support communities from here. It is our hope that these recommendations are taken on board to improve the way we all support and champion community-based nature conservation in Aotearoa. We believe this work is more critical than ever in the current global context, with increasing polarisation of communities and a growing disconnect between people and the environment. Supporting community conservation provides a pathway to connect, inspire and collaborate instead.

Dr Andrea Byrom & Jessi Morgan

Executive summary and recommendations

Community-led efforts to protect and restore species and ecosystems are a core part of the solution to New Zealand's biodiversity crisis. Thousands of New Zealanders are engaged in conservation activities across all land tenures, supporting the core work of agencies like the Department of Conservation (DOC) and councils. Landowners, iwi and hapū, catchment groups, community organisations, ecosanctuaries, education providers and the private sector contribute to improving the survival of our indigenous species in myriad ways.

But conservation is a long game. The effort cannot be sustained by volunteers alone, or with short term bursts of support. The deepening conservation funding crisis is felt keenly in the community sector. With urgent action we can maintain the progress that has been made and sufficiently catalyse community efforts in the future. This report aims to get a fresh picture of the community conservation sector, understand the current funding challenges and consider how funding and support can be improved.

National and regional strategic documents make clear the dependency on individuals, the not-for-profit sector, iwi and hapū, philanthropic givers and the private sector to protect indigenous ecosystems and species in line with national and international goals. Activities are diverse and include pest control, species management, education programs, environmental monitoring, data pooling, supporting science, providing visitor infrastructure, and empowering communities to care for their environment. Many community groups manage facilities and activities formerly the domain of public agencies, in a significant transfer of responsibility resulting from ever constrained budgets. There is broad recognition that the job is much too large for any entity to have sole responsibility for, and that collaboration is thus essential. Our reliance on the community conservation sector must be reflected in the way we support it.

This research is based on interviews and a survey of more than 300 community conservation groups (including landowners, iwi and hapū, and conservation organisations of all scales). The results show that community-based nature conservation is diverse, growing and committed, but resourcing is drying up. The sector faces an uncertain future without improved funding models, and we stand to lose many of the gains achieved to date (social, cultural, economic and ecological). Core conservation agencies like DOC and councils are also struggling financially, meaning it is harder to meet our aspirations for our natural heritage regardless of who is in charge.

Funding for conservation more generally is widely acknowledged to be a mere fraction of what is needed to reverse environmental trajectories. Funding and support for community conservation similarly fall short. Changes are needed to ensure it can make the contribution community conservation is capable of and keen to make. Given the current level of conservation funding, agencies cannot handle the job by themselves. Therefore, finding ways to better empower and support community-led actions is essential. The key areas for improvement will demand the collective efforts of agencies, businesses, philanthropists, and other stakeholders but will provide a more sustainable and diversified model of operations for community conservation.

To continue to support and empower the community conservation movement, New Zealand must take decisive action. This research recommends the following key shifts:

1. Enhanced cooperation including between groups and landowners and between agencies, landowners and groups. Clear tensions where they exist need to make way for genuine

partnership and cooperation that maximises the benefits at scale and respects the contributions of all the players fairly at place.

2. Efficient funding models that are tailored to sector needs will ensure the resources that are available are used to best effect and support the sector (including its considerable volunteer base) the way that works best, increasing security of outcomes and limiting unnecessary transaction costs.
3. Measuring outcomes and telling the story of what the community conservation movement is achieving will help overcome scepticism about effectiveness, providing clear information to funders, agencies and the wider public about the benefits, including those which are 'beyond biodiversity' and maintain accountability.
4. Increasing the amount and range of resources available to fund and support community-based conservation work including through government and other traditional funding in addition to novel sources of funding that can share the load. This shift will require support for many groups, and require a thorough understanding of the risks and benefits of each income option.



Contents

Foreword	3
Executive summary and recommendations	4
Part I Overview	8
Background to the issue	8
Previous work	8
What do we mean by ‘community conservation’?	9
Community conservation in context.....	10
2019-2024 funding and the attrition on the horizon	11
Part 2 Survey and interviews: methods and results	11
How we conducted this research	12
Survey method and questions	12
Part 3 Survey results.....	13
Question 1: What do we know about the community conservation sector from who participated in this survey?	13
Legal structures vary, and for a third of groups – they don’t have one	14
Community conservation is increasingly complex.....	14
Most groups are not affiliated with a collective.....	15
Increasing longevity and experience of groups reflects a maturing sector.....	17
The number of participants groups rely on can be very small	18
The scale of group operations has generally increased, and sometimes in a big way	19
An initial taxonomy to guide engagement with community conservation	20
Question 2: What do we know about their funding situation and what they need?	22
Most groups have experienced stability or increase in funding in the last five years.....	23
The annual funding of groups varies widely, but 2 in 5 receive under \$5,000 a year total and finding it takes time.....	23
Groups draw funding from a range of sources, and some are more impactful than others...	23
Groups spend funding in a variety of areas, but materials and staff dominate	26
In-kind support plays a critical role, particularly in providing expert advice.....	27
The time and effort needed to find appropriate funding isn’t worth it for many groups.....	27
Most mahi in community conservation is unpaid, meaning it relies on voluntary effort	29
Respondents experience many challenges in finding funding	31
Question 3: What do we know about their frustrations and ideas for the future?.....	34
Many groups face an uncertain future due to a lack of secure funding.....	34
Many groups need more support with demonstrating their value and telling their story	36
Many respondents feel the contribution of community conservation is not respected	37
Part 4: Key shifts to improve the funding and support of community conservation	39
Key shift 1: Enhance cooperation and alignment to improve impact.....	39
How do we achieve this shift?.....	39
Key shift 2: Efficient funding models, tailored to sector needs	42
How do we achieve this shift?.....	43
Key shift 3: Help groups demonstrate impact through outcome monitoring	45

How do we achieve this shift? 45

Key shift 4: Boost investment including through alternative funding options 47

How do we achieve this shift? 47

a. Contracts for services 48

b. Endowment funds..... 48

c. Resource management mitigation funding and similar arrangements 48

d. Voluntary carbon credits 49

References..... 49

Appendix 1 Survey questions 52



Part I Overview

Background to the issue

Community conservation is a movement of which New Zealand is rightfully proud. Individuals, landowners and organisations across New Zealand are willing to gift their time and resources to contribute to a better future for our natural heritage alongside agency-led efforts. Their efforts in pest and weed control, planting, monitoring, education and engagement and threatened species management help create a better future for our indigenous biodiversity than agencies alone could hope to achieve.

The movement is fast growing. From rural and urban backyard trapping groups that have arisen in great numbers, in part due to the predator free movement, to large place-based entities such as island sanctuaries (Tiritiri Matangi) and mainland ventures like Zealandia, Pūkaha and Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari, the level of participation and visibility of non-agency-led conservation is significant and increasing all the time. Further, collaboration between agencies and non-agency conservation, increasingly supported by business and philanthropy, has never been greater. Conservation is increasingly a multi-party effort involving many people across the country. But it needs more support.

Funding for conservation is a mere fraction of what is needed to reverse environmental decline. Community-led initiatives suffer from poor resourcing, making it hard to meet goals, maintain gains and attract more volunteers. Poor resourcing contributes to limited capacity for coordination, strategic planning, technical capability, monitoring and evaluation.

Previous work

This report is the third in a series examining funding¹ and institutional recognition² of community conservation. The key driver of this research was the growing disjunct between the demand for funding and support for community conservation and the resources available, including the pending funding cliff of the end of Jobs for Nature and the attrition and withdrawal of other forms of funding. In 2018, Predator Free New Zealand Trust (PFNZ) examined community conservation funding and determined that it needed transformation both in how it was distributed and the basis for that distribution. Four key conclusions and recommendations were tabled.

The first recommendation was to ‘establish a national and regionally linked institution that will provide visibility, strategic advice and practical support to community conservationists including landowners’. This recommendation arose from concerns that agencies, particularly DOC, were struggling to engage with the sector effectively and that the sector had no national voice. In the intervening years, further hubs have been developed, and the likes of the Predator Free NZ Trust have somewhat filled that role, but it is clear from this research that the basis of the suggestion has not been resolved.

The second recommendation was to ‘develop a national strategic conservation plan to coalesce and prioritise conservation effort’. The purpose of this plan was to ‘set a course (hopefully tenure neutral) for conservation overall, thus making it possible for the likes of the community conservation

¹ Brown MA Transforming community conservation funding in New Zealand. PFNZ Trust available at [PFNZ-Trust-Transforming-Community-Conservation-Funding-in-NZ-May-2018-compressed.pdf \(predatorfreenz.org\)](https://predatorfreenz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2020_04_07-Better-Together-Dr-M-Doole-1-1.pdf)

² Doole MA Better together? A review of community conservation hubs in New Zealand available at https://predatorfreenz.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2020_04_07-Better-Together-Dr-M-Doole-1-1.pdf

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 (such as by philanthropic bodies as a decision support tool for fund allocation)³. Providing necessary direction for the sector has still not occurred at a national level, other than in recognising the sector's importance to national biodiversity goals in the Mana o te Taiao Biodiversity Strategy. Detailed information capable of guiding effort remains scant at a national level (however, more progress has been made in certain regions by regional councils and unitary authorities).

The third recommendation was to 'align public funding of conservation activities with level of conservation need, to maximise the difference made. Though controversial at the time, this suggestion reflects the public value that government funding in these budgets should prioritise protecting biodiversity. Using limited funds wisely ensures conservation goals can be met and helps demonstrate tangible outcomes to justify current and future investments. Relatedly, the final recommendation was to 'enhance the funding system by reorienting allocation and distribution to focus more stringently on outcomes and streamline processes to reduce transaction costs...'. As this report demonstrates, inefficient funding models are still common, and there is often ambiguity about outcomes achieved and demonstrated.

In 2020, research was commissioned to explore hubs and collectives in conservation. This research noted that hubs to catalyse effort at a landscape scale make logical sense as a concept, but that implementation could have been better. Key findings found that to be effective, hubs needed to:

- bridge strategy and practice
- have a diverse approach to engagement
- be funded in line with the functional role that they played in the landscape
- demonstrate and be evaluated based on their value-add
- potentially be centrally coordinated in line with the first recommendation of the 2018 work.

Planning, executing and evaluating community conservation outcomes remains challenging, but recent work has helped clarify drivers of participation and demonstrable outcomes. Larger organisations increasingly measure beyond biodiversity outcomes, as seen with this example at Sanctuary Mountain Maungatautari.³ Predator Free Wellington also addressed some of the social and ecological outcomes of community-led work.⁴ While outcomes from mainland and island sanctuaries and large-scale projects with agency involvement are clearer, data on ecological outcomes in many parts of the sector remain limited.

What do we mean by 'community conservation'?

Community conservation is interpreted broadly for this report. All conservation efforts led by other than government agencies (government includes councils) are within scope. These may be carried out by individual landowners (often with the support of an organisation like the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust).

³ [Sanctuary+Mountain+Maungatautari+Social+Impact+Report+2021.22_Med+Res-compressed.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

⁴ Whitburn and Shanahan, 2022

Scope includes groups of adjacent landowners as part of catchment groups or farming collectives, iwi and hapū and a range of other organisations which play essential roles at place and at various scales, often supported by hubs and collectives.⁵

This survey also demonstrates that ‘community conservation’ is increasingly complex, commonly involving multiple parties working in the same or similar space. Agencies play different roles in each context, such as coordination, technical support, fund administration, regulation and others, while other organisations such as tourism ventures, zoos and aquariums, Crown Research Institutes, universities and private research and consulting organisations play crucial core and supporting roles too. It is possible that the term ‘community conservation’ is becoming outdated, and a new framing is needed that reflects the range of values and motivations and the diversity of the parties involved. However, for this report, a broad view is taken of what it means to ensure the learnings are applied as widely as is useful.

Community conservation in context

Conservation in all forms is a welfare recipient in New Zealand’s current economic model. The public interest in a healthy environment is often regarded as a ‘nice to have’: discretionary expenditure possible in times of surplus but challenging otherwise. This context generates a scarcity of funding, undermining our ability to sustain the natural systems that, in turn, sustain us. So long as this is the case, conservation will remain in receipt of crumbs on the table.... these macro-scale issues need to be overcome in the long-term to secure the future of nature in New Zealand.

We increasingly recast conservation funding as an investment in our wellbeing and our prospects of fundamental survival. When used to best effect, investment will mean we can better address urgent and long-term threats. This powerful framing must be continually reinforced to genuinely take hold.

Recognising the investment required in our prosperity would mean the budgets of agencies charged with protecting biodiversity would be much larger than at present, and the landscape of fiscal scarcity would change to one that incentivised restoration and regeneration over degradation and harm.

To reframe nature protection as an investment instead of a cost, we must better recognise our natural heritage's considerable economic value, which underpins industries, mitigates climate change impacts, safeguards traditional ways of life, and then the way conservation initiatives support these functions. And further, we need to understand the true cost of the degradation from unsustainable use and pursue economic reforms to normalise ecological restoration at scale.

It is beyond the scope of this report to address the broader context for why conservation struggles generally to attract sufficient support, ample evidence shows that many New Zealanders want better outcomes for our flora and fauna. The recommendations in this report offer proximal solutions to achieving this in the short to medium term.

⁵ The reference to ‘hubs and collectives’ refers to organisations primarily set up for the purpose of supporting conservation initiatives usually at a grass roots level. Hubs and collectives vary in their scale, funding and approach but they act to catalyse effort and coordinate at scale. Examples include Bay Conservation Alliance and

2019–2024 funding and the attrition on the horizon

The primary focus of this research is the past five years. The years 2019 to 2024 have been tumultuous globally, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the fiscal response of governments. The effect of these challenging years on the community sector in New Zealand has been significant, and many common themes found in this survey are reflected at a broader level.⁶

The multi-agency funding programme Mahi mō te Taiao/Jobs for Nature (J4N) rolled out more than a billion dollars⁷ to create nature-based jobs. More than 50 respondents to our survey (1 in 6) identified the programme as a key funding source, credited particularly with enabling the employment of staff in a sector that traditionally struggles to fund these positions. A total of 31 respondents identified it as their most impactful funding source, although we presume its impact is much greater. This is because significant funding moved through various channels and might not have been identified by groups as J4N funding. Some of the funding also went to supporting agencies with additional FTEs made available to support community efforts.

The implications of the end of Jobs for Nature are not well understood at a sector level and will be specific to projects and places. Unfortunately, only limited transition planning occurred before the funding ends⁸, and no extension of the funding was provided in Budget 2024. As a result, many projects risk losing their progress unless they find new funding resources. However, other funding is limited and very unlikely to be as large, meaning downscaling is likely necessary anyway. Further, some groups report that other funders including private donors are sometimes put off by requests to support projects that are finishing their J4N funding, feeling they are being expected to cover for government withdrawal of funding.

Alongside the end of Jobs for Nature funding is attrition in other long-running funding sources.⁹ Prioritisation analyses have also diverted conservation funding that groups previously relied on, further contributing to the problem. While the role of different funding sources (philanthropy and business) in community conservation is growing all the time, it remains only complementary to most government funding.

Alongside the inadequate scale of funding, the sector continues to grapple with the need to cooperate and align in increasingly complex spaces, inefficient funding models that do not match sector needs and significant information and monitoring gaps that constrain the demonstration of impact. The good news is these issues can be solved to make a real practical difference in how community conservation can contribute. This report moves that conversation forward.

⁶ Centre for Social Impact 2023 Hui-e! survey of the community sector demonstrated a range of macro trends and is recommended further reading - [Time-to-Shine- COVID19-Impact-Community-Survey-Summary-Report.pdf \(huie.org.nz\)](#)

⁷ During the 2024 budget cuts requested by the incoming coalition government, a quantum of Jobs for Nature funding was returned to the Treasury. At the time of writing, the exact amount was not known across all the agencies involved. It should also be noted that Jobs for Nature included existing funding programmes, some of which have ceased in its wake, resulting in a net loss of conservation funding for at least the 2024/25 year.

⁸ Due to the length of time it took to establish some projects, many initiatives have J4N funding through to 2026. It is not an extension of funding, but an extension of time to spend the same quantum.

⁹ The Lotteries Environment and Heritage Fund reduced by more than 45% for the 2024/25 funding year compared with 2023/24. This is significant not only in terms of quantum, but because this fund is one of the few in the environmental sector to cover operational funding such as salaries. DOC's Community Fund was \$8,132,783 in 2019, down to \$7,200,000 in 2023. Other funds have also reduced and some have disappeared entirely or appear closed for the foreseeable future.

Part 2 Survey and interviews: methods and results

How we conducted this research

The primary method was a nationwide online survey supplemented with a literature review and interviews with experts and other stakeholders. Three hundred and eleven respondents completed¹⁰ the survey from a total of 516 pre-qualified responses.

The survey addressed three specific lines of inquiry:

1. What is the size, scale and nature of the community groups or projects engaged in nature conservation in New Zealand?
2. What is the current state of funding for projects and groups, and what are their funding needs?
3. How can the funding situation be improved for future community-led nature conservation initiatives?

Only the complete responses were analysed. The beginning of each section of questions briefly explains why the questions in that set were asked, brief reflections are included below and Appendix 1 contains more detail. Interviews were arranged by phone or email and occurred usually via Microsoft Teams. They were only minimally structured and generally targeted at unpacking critical areas of inquiry based on the subject's background and expertise. For brevity, they are referenced as supporting material to the core of the work: the survey.

Survey method and questions

The purpose of this research and the size and scale of the sector made an online survey the most pragmatic strategy to gather perspectives, augmented with formal and follow-up interviews. The survey comprised 26 questions and ran from the end of March to the end of April 2024 via online survey platform Survey Monkey. The opportunity to participate was widely circulated through email and social media channels. There was an element of reliance on word of mouth, and certain sectors of the population may have been less likely to be aware of it.

Results indicate significant diversity in the types of respondents. Landowners, iwi and hapū, community restoration groups, sanctuaries, catchment groups, hubs and collectives all participated in some form. The survey likely under-represented conservation groups not heavily focused on predator control, iwi and hapū initiatives and groups with low or no connection to the internet.

Part of the reason for the likely under-representation of iwi and hapū is that any 'conservation initiatives' that might be traditionally considered a separate undertaking through a Western lens are deeply enmeshed in community activities and may not be thought of by those doing them as 'community conservation'. Conservation initiatives by iwi and hapū have a special status because they commonly engage aspects of the Crown Treaty partnership, including efforts by Māori to restore ancestral lands returned in a parlous state from when sale or confiscation occurred. While it is hoped the findings of this report are helpful and aligned, they in no way seek to claim to represent the views of iwi and hapū.

¹⁰ Many surveys did not go through to completion. A subset of partial and full survey responses, when compared, showed that the trends across the responses did not generally differ whether partial responses were included or not.

Part 3 Survey results

The survey results were comprehensive, containing many useful ideas and pertinent comments and narratives. We have endeavoured to present them clearly, but conveying the full complexity is not possible.

Question 1: What do we know about the community conservation sector from who participated in this survey?

Key findings include:

- About a third of respondents (31%) are not legal entities.
- Pest animal control is the most common activity (87% of respondents do this), followed by plant pest control (55%), plant propagation (51%), monitoring (46%) and education (43%).
- Only 24% of respondents appear to focus their effort on protected areas alone, indicating a more complex operating environment.
- 58% of respondents are not affiliated with a hub or collective.
- Groups have most commonly existed for 3-5 years, followed very closely by 16+ years, with overall numbers indicating a maturing sector.
- Many groups rely on a handful of people, but the most common number of regular volunteers is 6-20.
- Most groups have experienced some or a major increase in scale in the last 5 years.

The purpose of this question set was to understand the basic features of the respondents and consider whether the profile of groups told us anything about community conservation more generally. The question of who is doing what and how they are organised provides an opportunity for insights into what drives communities and how they prefer to work.

Previous work by Peters et al (2015) and more recently by Sinner et al (2022) and McFarlane et al (2022) provided helpful background and insights for this work. There remains, however, no comprehensive national stocktake or census of community conservation efforts, so it is challenging to understand the full suite of approaches. This ambiguity can make tailoring funding and support difficult, and it is for that purpose that we attempt to characterise the sector.

Describing the sector's state gives us important clues about how groups operate, their focus areas, and their important characteristics. This can help us target improvements in funding and support and better consider the sector's needs.

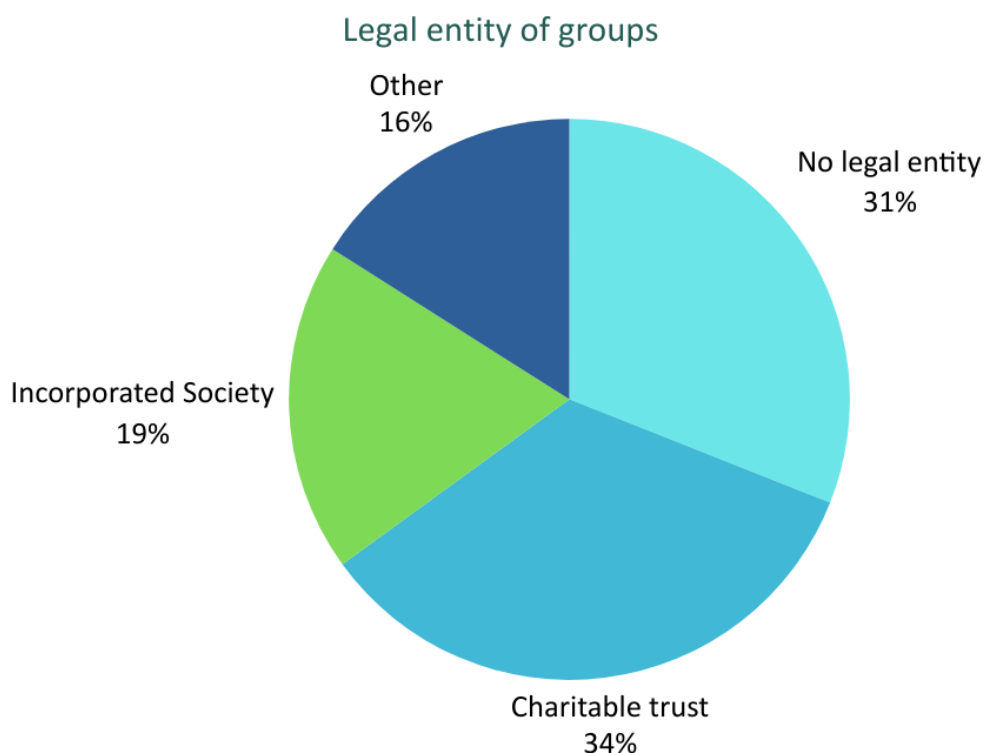
Community-based nature conservation has an activity profile that is:

- **diverse:** a large range of groups and projects are active with different levels of professionalisation
- **growing:** the participation levels and scale of activity are increasing over time
- **committed:** community members maintain efforts over long periods of time.

Legal structures vary, and for a third of groups – they don't have one

How a group is structured has important implications for funding and support (i.e. groups that are not legal entities may not qualify for most external funding). Three main groups dominated: charitable trusts, groups that were not legal entities, and incorporated societies. A fourth category comprised a range of different models including charitable companies.

So far we have not gone the registered charity route, although this may become necessary at some point to obtain funding. We feel the additional bureaucracy would be burdensome and we are trying to keep it simple. If there were any way to lobby for an easier way to have charitable status it would be good. Maybe also some advice on pros and cons of incorporation or not. We want to spend money on traps, not accountant's fees for preparing accounts and filing returns!



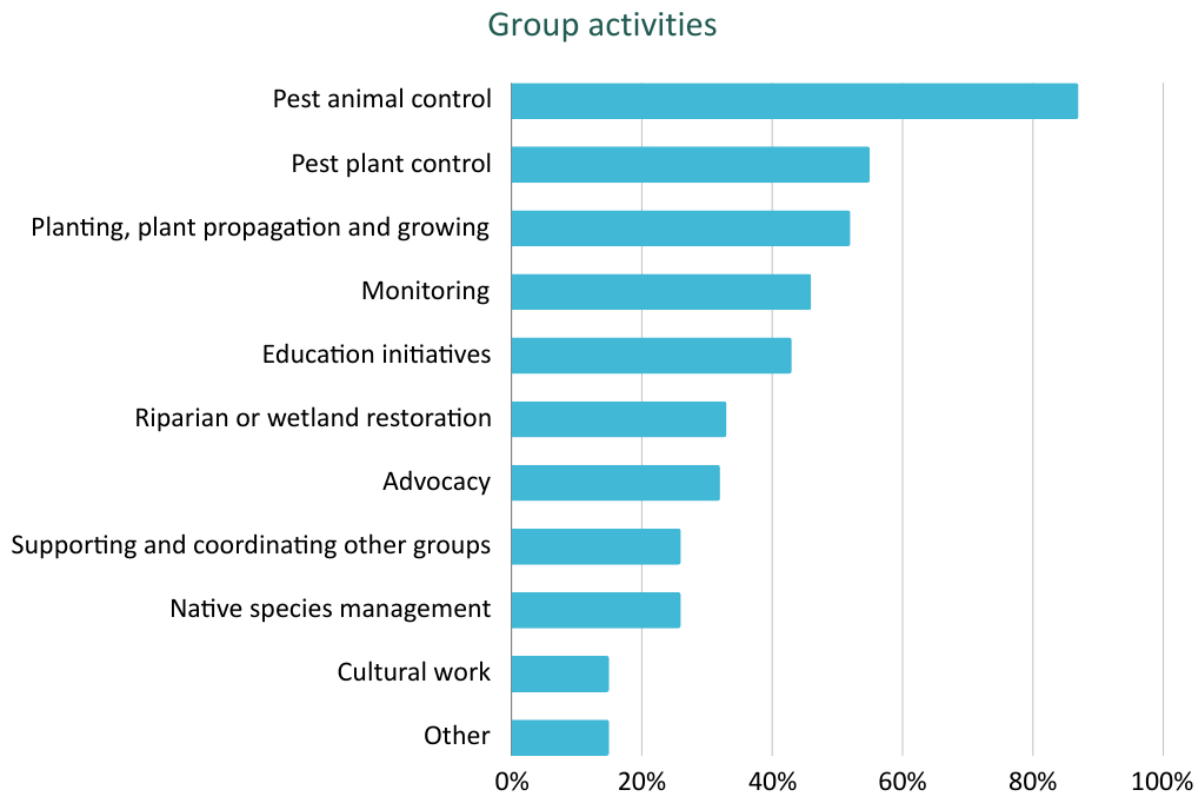
The sector's legal profile is of interest on its own, but it also provided a basis for delving further into other answer sets. We stratified these using the three main entity types to see whether further trends or insights emerged.

Community conservation is increasingly complex

Only 74 (24%) groups named a specific protected area that held their complete focus. This indicates that many groups work in multiple places or across multiple tenure types. This growing complexity

requires planning¹¹, coordination, and collaboration. To maximise their impact, groups will need innovative and flexible funding models.

We asked respondents what their main activities are. Most groups are undertaking pest animal control (87%), with more than half focusing on pest plant control. Strikingly, the profile of focus areas did not change much when the groups were stratified across the three dominant groupings (no legal entity, charitable trust, incorporated society) – the primary activities were the same.¹²



Most groups are not affiliated with a collective

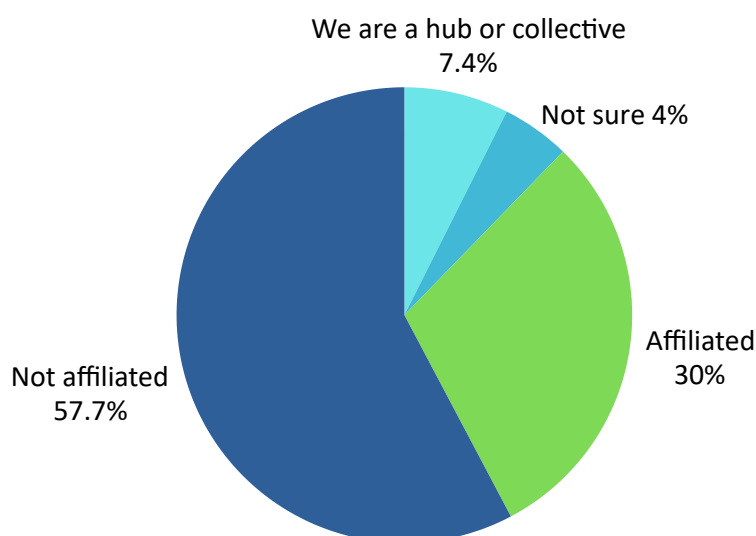
Hubs and collectives are a growing feature of the conservation landscape. The majority (57%) of conservation groups in the survey did not report being affiliated with a hub or collective. The relatively high number of groups without an umbrella organisation supporting their efforts suggests there is room to improve cooperation at a landscape scale. This does not mean a group operates in a vacuum; it can mean their type of organisation is not well served by the hubs in existence or their primary relationships are with agencies directly.

Of the 310 respondents to this question, 23 (7.5%) identified themselves as a hub or collective. Of the remaining 287, 15 weren't sure if they were affiliated, and 93 confirmed they were and named a formal or informal hub to which they aligned.

¹¹ Work by Galbraith et al in 2016 demonstrated that many conservation groups had limited plans and strategies to guide their work and measure outcomes against

¹² Sinner et al. (2022) provided further recent insights into the activities undertaken by catchment and community groups, which is recommended as additional reading.

Groups affiliated with a hub or collective



A survey by the Cawthron Institute showed all participants valued the connection with a collective, noting:

'All survey participants perceived that involvement in a collective enables constituent groups to have greater impact. Participants reported that membership in a collective increases the: capacity and resources available to groups; connectivity between groups and with the environment; constituent groups' sense of identity and purpose, and their pride and confidence in their work; and groups' regeneration scope and objectives.' McFarlane et al, 2021

Hubs and collectives as drivers of cooperation

Hubs (formal and informal) were well recognised in the survey as being providers of direct and indirect support that freed staff and volunteers up to focus on the on-the-ground efforts and improved cooperation. Given the scale of community conservation, consolidating efforts in a way that suits local and regional circumstances continues to be a worthwhile endeavour.

Hubs (based on survey responses and interviews) are particularly important in relation to brokering cooperation as they can undertake:

- the administration of funds to avoid a group having to establish legally and run a bank account
- provision of technical advice and driving the incorporation of new techniques into practice
- the support of events and fundraising efforts through providing advice and practical support like meeting rooms and event management skills
- general moral support and opportunities for cohesion
- strategic advice, particularly in exploring alternative funding models.

Hubs and collectives are not intended to replace agencies but can focus on engagement and sometimes be more successful in doing so as they are not seen to be 'government'.

Notwithstanding the obvious benefits, the survey did net numerous critiques of existing hubs, most particularly related to whether the hub/collective:

(a) helps as much as it leads funders to believe¹³

(b) acts to exclude certain groups based on personal relationships and local politics

(c) competes directly with the groups it is supporting for the same funding (n.b. this is driven by context and funds available and is sometimes unavoidable).

Funding needs and success metrics will differ between hubs or collectives and traditional conservation organisations. Bespoke approaches and clear evaluation frameworks are necessary to measure success and show contributions to other outcomes. This may include establishing guiding principles of operation if they are not already in place.

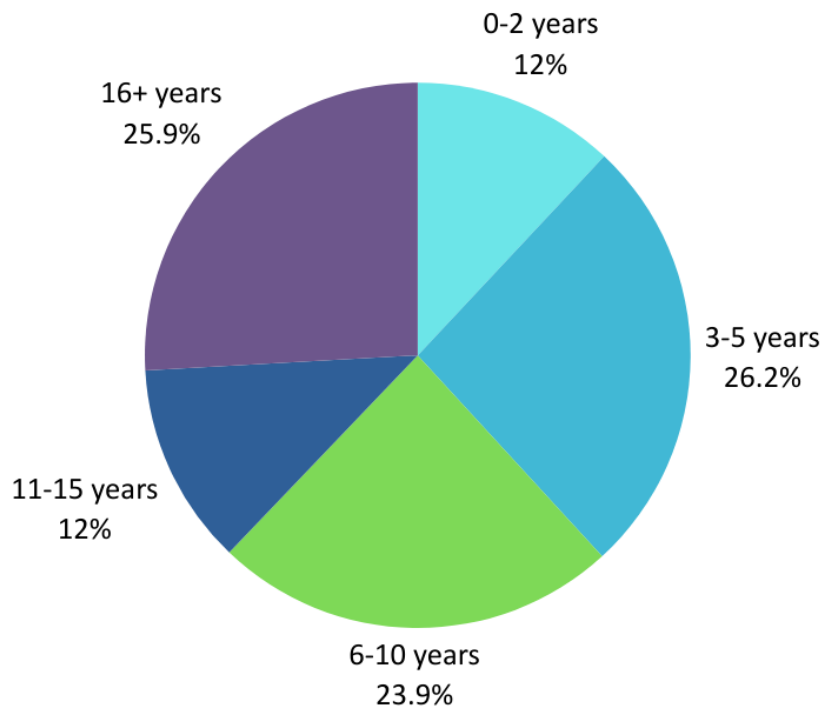
Increasing longevity and experience of groups reflects a maturing sector

How long a group has been active reflects the maturity and commitment of those behind it. Phenomena like the predator free movement and Jobs for Nature have resulted in more recent proliferation. In this survey, the two most common age ranges were 3-5 years and 16+ years. Previous studies have often illustrated the relative youth of many conservation groups and projects (e.g. our 2018 report noted 82% of groups were less than 5 years old). These new figures likely reflect a maturing sector, growing in experience and sophistication.

We have a 24-year track record which we can point to, but more importantly we have managed to continue planting and tree care in recent years with our current smaller group.

¹³ Hubs and collectives need to ensure that when they claim to support conservation groups that they do focus sufficient attention on that activity rather than focusing on other aligned but different activities

How long groups have been active



The number of participants groups rely on can be very small

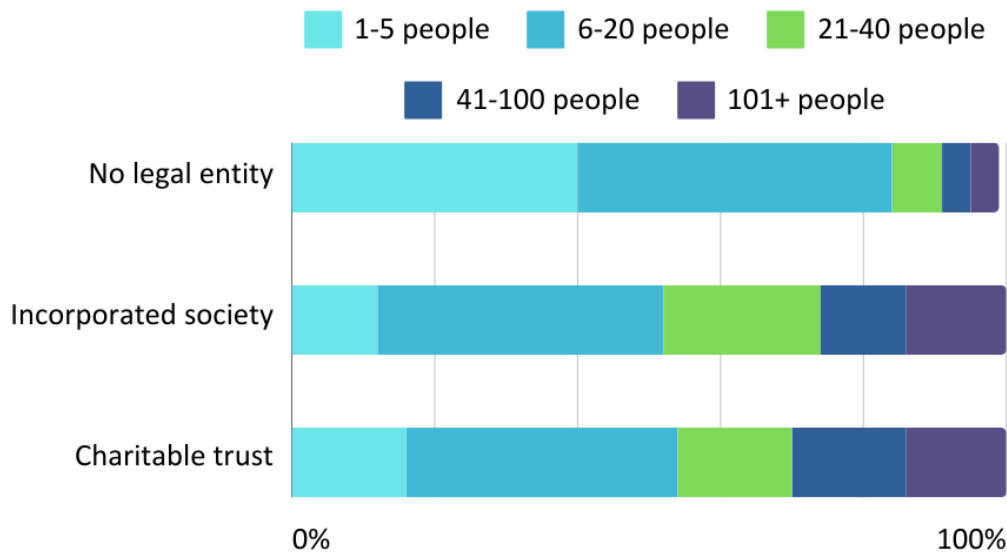
Many conservation groups are small, fuelled by a small core of committed volunteers. This question focused on 'ordinary' participation and excluded any random or one-off reasons for participation, such as annual planting events. Responses showed:

- there was a dominant reliance on 6-20 individuals in an average month (41%)
- nearly a quarter (and almost all non-legal entities, which generally include landowners and individuals) rely on less than 5 regular participants
- 10% of projects report more than 100 volunteers monthly.

This question demonstrates that while the level of participation (regular and sustained) is likely growing in the sector, many groups heavily rely on a handful of people. Many volunteers are aging, and managing the physical demands of volunteering is a vital issue (e.g., hiring contractors to do demanding tasks as volunteers are not able to manage them due to age).

The trends associated with an aging workforce and the broader issue of volunteer burnout have been clearly signalled in conservation for many years, including in the earlier reports in this series. These vulnerabilities underline later recommendations relating to supporting staff and operational costs and highlight that not all sector workforce risks relate to money.

Participant numbers in a standard month



Q21. How many people participate in your group or project's activities at least once in a standard month, including you?

The scale of group operations has generally increased, and sometimes in a big way

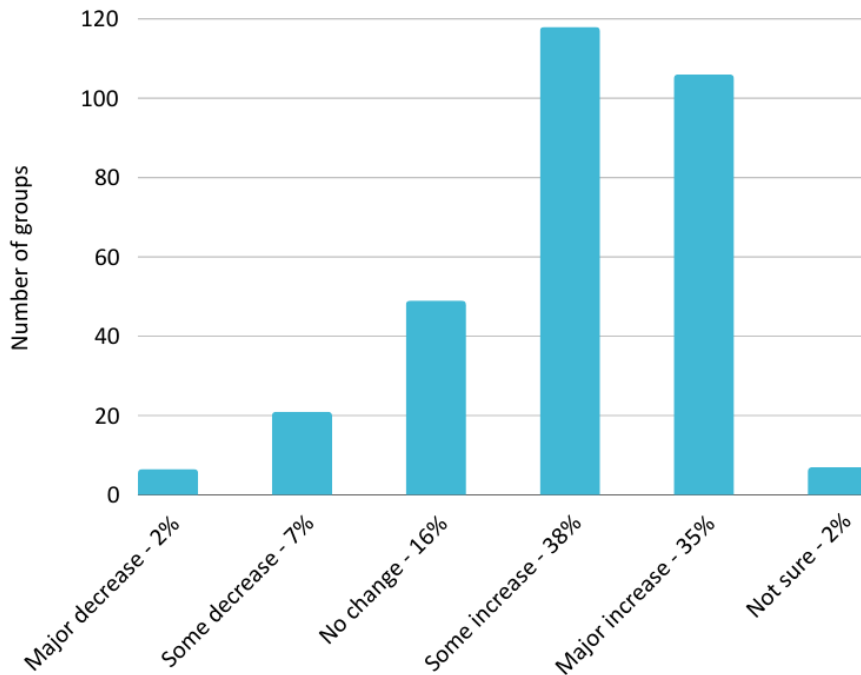
Most respondents (73%) increased the scale of their activities (this was measured in different ways) between 2019-2024. Approximately 1 in 6 groups (16%) have maintained their scale of operations, while the small remainder have decreased. Incorporated societies and charitable trusts were more likely to have grown in scale compared to groups that are not legal entities. Overall, the scale of the respondent's work has generally grown or been maintained.

The increase in scale over five years can be compared with the change in funding in the next section. The likelihood a respondent's initiative has increased in scale is much greater and starker than the likelihood that the funding has increased. This information shows that the scale of work and funding levels are disconnected and that the sector is trying to do more with less. It emphasises the sector's reliance on volunteers and suggests it is trying to achieve more with fewer resources or expand work into more places without increasing resources.

We are a small group that opened an old track to gain access for recreation and planting and we have extended into pest and weed control.

We have a similar number of people involved, but we have expanded our work to become more diverse, including translocation of native species (in conjunction with DOC), release of biocontrol agents for Tradescantia as well as the normal activities of pest and weed control, alongside native plantings.

Change in scale 2019 - 2024



Q8. How has the scale of your project changed in the last five years (2019-2024)?

For example, the number of people involved, the amount or diversity of work, or the spatial scale.

The change in scale of community conservation is reflected in the increasing numbers of groups and individuals involved, the increasing scale of the undertakings themselves and the increasingly complexity and variety of activities undertaken. The assumption that an increase in scale is clearly confirmed by this survey, but the actual numbers involved in community conservation, of groups and individuals, where they are working, the extent of their activities and the outcomes being achieved remain only broadly described. However, it is important to recognise the diversity of the sector to optimise support, and that is attempted in the next section.

An initial taxonomy to guide engagement with community conservation

The survey that underpins this research told us a lot about the structure of the community conservation sector. The information has been consolidated into the table below; a suggested taxonomy for the sector. The purpose of the taxonomy is to:

- Demonstrate the diversity in the sector to allow funders and agencies to similarly diversify their approach with engagement if they have not already
- Illustrate that hubs and collectives that aim to coordinate and support other efforts have different funding needs to the groups that 'do the doing' (noting many are hybrids of the two approaches)
- Demonstrate the difference in scale of organisations, which has important implications for the optimal ways to support them
- Illustrate that the funding needs of organisations with or without staff are quite different

The purpose of the taxonomy is not to be accurate, but simply to demonstrate the different types of organisations and individual projects that can exist. It is unlikely to capture all types, and certain conservation groups (e.g. those led by iwi and hapū) likely require bespoke approaches.

Type	Core purpose	Participation	Total funding	Legal status	Paid staff/contractors	Geographic area
Hub or collective	Specific purpose of coordination/engagement through provision of advice and promotion of cooperation	Constituent groups and the collectives own focus areas (may cover hundreds or thousands of people)	\$25,000+	Legal entity, such as incorporated and or charitable trust most likely	Likely to have than 1 FTE, likely more	May be functional in a particular area of conservation (species based) or a geographic area. May also not be solely focused on conservation
Staffed conservation organisation	Community-led conservation organisation with a core staff	A core of volunteers of 20+ with staff, most likely linked to an ecosanctuary	\$100,000+	Most likely an incorporated society or charitable trust	Likely to have at least 1 FTE, likely more	May cover a significant geographic area (potentially landscape scale) and/or do a wide range of work
Volunteer organisation	Volunteer reliant organisations with minimal paid resourcing focused on place-based or topic-focused conservation	5-50 volunteers	>\$5000	Most likely an incorporated society or charitable trust	<1 FTE and may have contractors for specific things	Variable but most likely place-based with a moderate range of work areas
Local volunteer group	Volunteers and/or landowner-based initiative	Likely to rely on a small number of volunteers, as few as 1 and up to 20-40	<\$5000 of funding per year, and may be only in-kind materials	Unlikely to be a legal entity	No regular staff, but specified contractors (e.g. pest control) may be used	Likely to work in a confined area or doing a narrow range of tasks according to capacity
Individual landowner	Landowner initiative on private land	Landowner and potentially others	Variable, often self-funded	Unlikely to be a legal entity	May utilise contractors or existing staff (e.g., farm manager) to carry out work	Within private property boundaries but may include other areas on the periphery



Question 2: What do we know about their funding situation and what they need?

Key findings about the current state of funding:

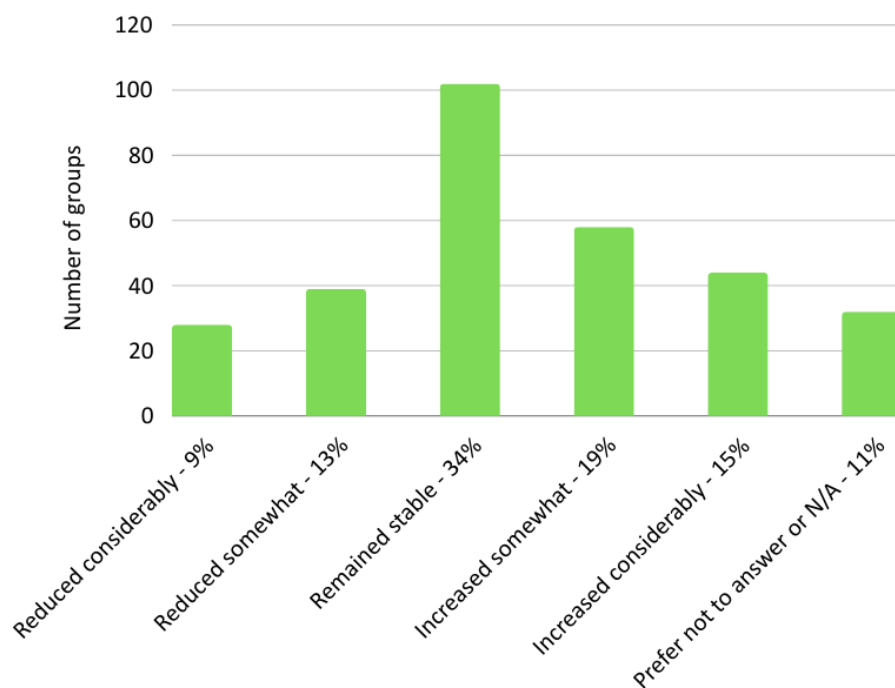
- Most group's funding has been stable or increased over the last five years.
- Budgets vary significantly, but 41% of groups received less than \$5,000 in the last year.
- Dominant sources of funding are the volunteers themselves and government grants, with philanthropy and non-government grants significant, but less likely to be the most impactful form of funding.
- Buying materials for all groups, and funding staff and operational overheads for more formal organisations are the main categories of expenditure, with the latter being much tougher to find.
- In-kind support is critically important, especially practical supplies and technical support.
- Most organisations are all or mostly voluntary and where staff are employed, they are generally few; most of the work is unpaid.
- A quarter of groups expect their work will have to cease within a year and many more will need to downscale.
- There is insufficient funding available to the sector to support their work, making competition often intense which can erode cooperation

The purpose of this question set was to understand the respondents' funding situation. We wanted to know how much funding and support they received and from where, how much effort it took to obtain it, what they spent it on, and the most impactful funding sources. Furthermore, we wanted to understand the challenges groups faced in sourcing that funding and support.

It can be difficult to meaningfully elicit a funding situation based on numbers alone. It requires a lot of contextual knowledge to understand the scale of activity compared to finances and the relative reliance on in-kind support. As such, we focused on both the financial quantum and the type of support to form a more rounded picture. Further, we asked about paid and unpaid labour proportions and what funding is spent on.

Most groups have experienced stability or increase in funding in the last five years

Change in funding situation 2019 - 2024



Q15. How has your funding situation changed in the past five years (2019-2024)?

Funding was most commonly reported to be 'stable' with a less obvious bias towards increases compared with scale of activity changes. This is reflected in free text responses, which indicate many different drivers of scale change, including recruiting more volunteers and diversifying activities.

The annual funding of groups varies widely, but 2 in 5 receive under \$5,000 a year total and finding it takes time

The responses to this question reflect the diversity of scale, with:

- 16% of groups reporting 'no funding', and 25% reporting less than \$5,000, indicating small operations with either low resource need or a high reliance on voluntary contributions (or both)
- approximately 20% of groups receive between \$5,000-25,000 annually
- 25 groups (8%) reporting annual funding of more than \$500,000
- many groups are giving up or noting their options are limited
- groups noting the time it takes to look for funding is only one aspect of the administration burden. Reporting etc comprises more commitment and often volunteers would prefer to do something else.

Groups draw funding from a range of sources, and some are more impactful than others

Where funding comes from, and its relative impact help us understand the dependencies in a system and where there are opportunities to boost contributions that are not being fully capitalised on. Funders keen to drive step changes and landscape-scale outcomes need to be aware of the relative impact at place of their funding.

It is important to note however, that funding not being viewed as the ‘most impactful’ does not mean it is not important and does not contribute to the overall outcome in specific and effective ways. Indeed, several comments in the survey noted all the mosaic of funding sources were important in their own way and that all inputs are appreciated.

Government grants are the most dominant source of funds and are generally cited as most impactful. More than a third of respondents mentioned councils as a key source. In addition, most groups supported by Jobs for Nature (also ‘government’) noted it was their most impactful funding. This suggests funding like J4N gave groups agency and autonomy, enabling them to effect more significant changes to depth and breadth of activities.

Groups draw support from many areas outside government, and the second most common category is self-funding—more than 60% of groups are putting their hands in their own pockets to keep going—this is true regardless of legal status. Many groups commented that they contributed their own funds due to challenges gaining funding and an unwillingness to engage with the bureaucracy of the process.

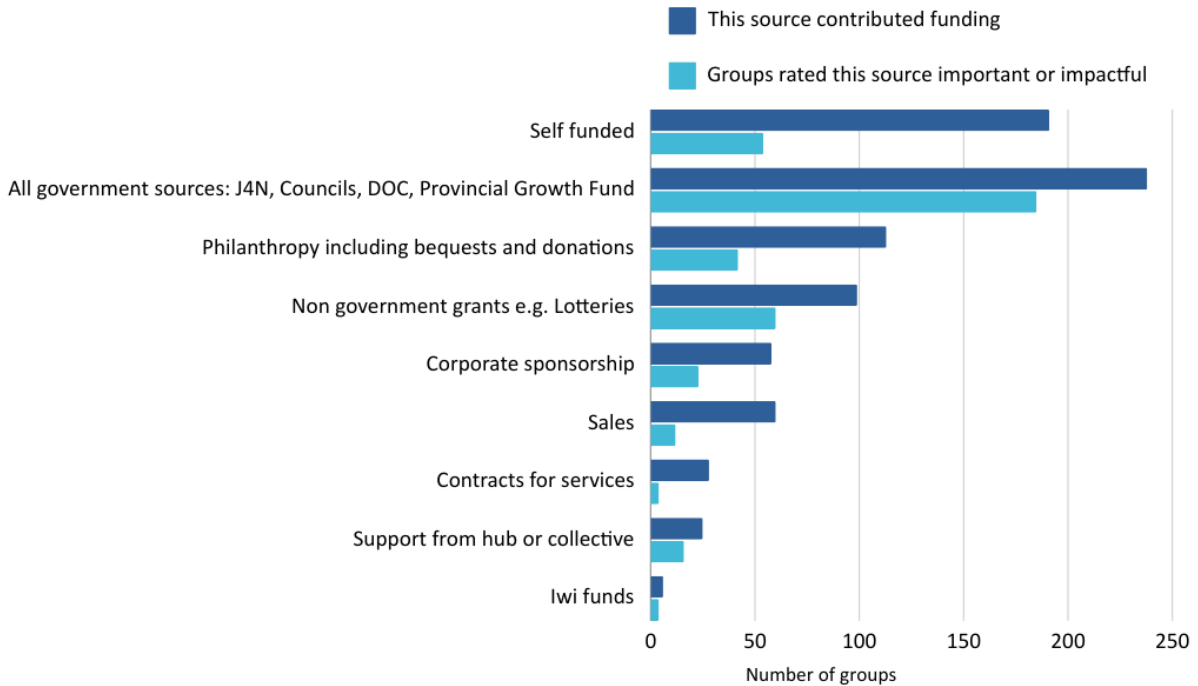
We are volunteer based. At our current scale, without any increase in scope of activities we just need a small amount of funds to buy bait/lure and hardware for trap repairs. I am currently just paying for this personally as I don't have the time to put in to securing more funding.

The graph below shows two types of responses: dark blue lines indicate how many respondents cited a funding source as relevant for their activities, while light blue lines show when respondents found that source very impactful. The closer the ends of the lines are, the more impactful that funding source is for the 311 respondents. Sources of income that are widely cited but less likely to be the most impactful include sales, contracts for services and self-funding.

By contrast, funding sources from government grants, iwi and hapū and support from a hub or collective are generally impactful where they are deployed. Philanthropy, non-government grants and corporate sponsorship appear to vary in their impact depending on circumstances, sometimes being critical to group operations and sometimes playing a more supporting role. Given the past five years and the dominance of Jobs for Nature however, it is important to recognise that the impacts of other funding streams may be muted in the results.



Sources and impact of funding



Q10. Over the past 12 months, what sources have contributed funding to your group of project?

Q11. What are your group's most important or impactful funding sources from the list above?

These findings also reflect that government funding generally comprises most of the funding for community conservation. The presence of the trend, regardless of whether Jobs for Nature was specifically identified, is unsurprising; literature demonstrates that most conservation is publicly funded worldwide. However government funding is clearly insufficient alone and the sector is increasingly reliant on a variety of funding sources.

Many respondents highlighted the challenging juggle of dealing with multiple funders, with a number highlighting potential innovations that could support funders and recipients alike, such as:

As the person responsible for administering [sic] and tracking fund expenditure, it would be great if an online database was available where transactions can be entered, tracked across the reporting period, validated according to criteria, with alerts to accountability report due dates, with the ability to produce regular summary reports. That would be incredible. I have built a spreadsheet that does all this but it's time consuming to track multiple funds across the whole organisation.

Would be great to have a portal/one stop shop for funding/support. Would also be great to have a type of online 'wallet' that stores the project info that could be used to suggest funding matches, support/info sources, and that could auto populate relevant fields of funding applications.

The challenges of brokering partnerships and co-funding arrangements in tight timeframes and with limited cohesion on the part of funders were acknowledged as key issues, especially for larger groups.

Understanding the challenges when only a portion of the money is given out - how do we raise the remaining money in the allotted time to spend the grant.

Several respondents suggested if funders were better joined up – including via a common online platform or regular liaison – the burden for often highly stretched groups to orchestrate multiple funding streams would be easier (e.g. in the Bay of Plenty a range of community funding organisations run a Regional Environmental Funders Network that meets regularly and coordinates support of many initiatives).

Groups spend funding in a variety of areas, but materials and staff dominate

Buying materials to support conservation activities was a significant destination for funding across all groups, with just under 80% of groups identifying it as a spending category for funding. This makes sense as such materials would be core to almost any activity and must be purchased if not donated or otherwise received. The second most common expenditure type was employing staff, with 41% of incorporated societies and more than half of charitable trusts identifying this as a main spending category. Other important expenditure areas included operational overheads and hiring contractors.

From this question, there seems to be an emerging division between volunteer groups and those groups that employed staff. This aspect engages an important theme of the survey: the challenges in securing funding for certain aspects of community-based nature conservation compared with others. The overwhelming feedback was that capital costs and equipment/consumables are:

- (a) more readily accepted as reasonable expenditure by funders
- (b) more easily able to be funded, and
- (c) easier to 'count' as having added value for reporting purposes.

The value of staff as connectors, enablers and amplifiers of activity is poorly understood by comparison.

Where one is increasingly relying on donations, one has to continually provide feedback to donors to encourage continued giving. While people understand about giving for tree planting, they are less likely to understand the importance of having a paid person to organise the activities, prepare the sites, oversee and train volunteers, monitor survival rates, write reports, purchase trees etc and equipment. We have a problem that the volunteers currently co-ordinating specific projects are now in their 80's and other volunteers are unwilling to take on such a major job.

It would be great to get funding for operational costs. Without an admin person we actually can't operate properly. We are lucky to have a lot of volunteers working with us but we still someone to lead and manage the volunteers. I'd love funders and philanthropists to understand this!

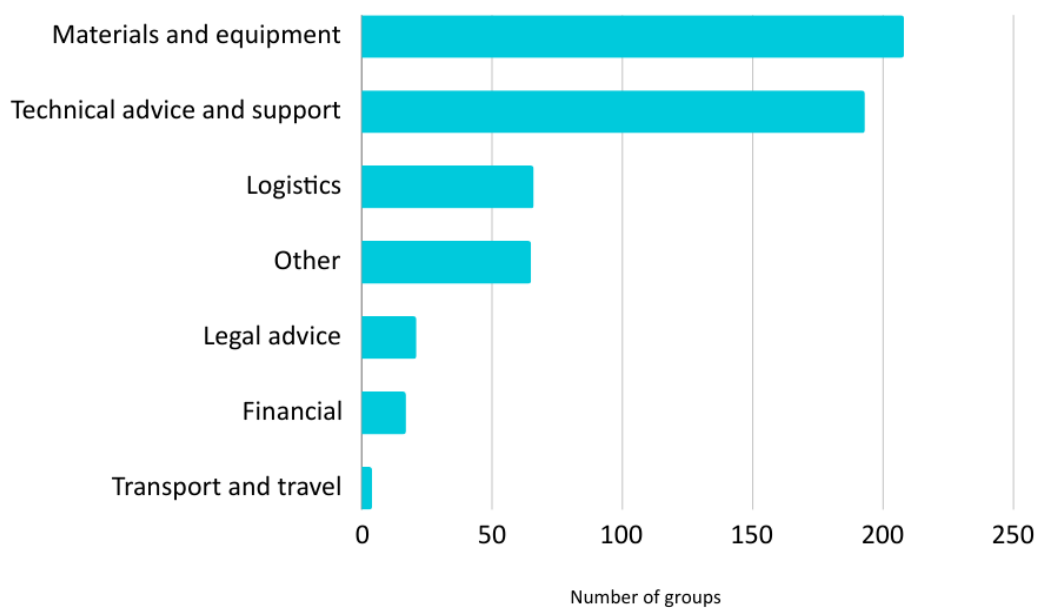
Clearly having only a 12 month window (max) on security of engagement of our one-day-per-week coordinator is a major limitation - and this is exacerbated by there being only a very small pool of available funders to apply for such costs.

Our planning includes considerable time for relationship building and funding application and accountability. Some funders prefer projects for items they can put their name on. On-going biosecurity and biodiversity are less tangible and harder to fund.

In-kind support plays a critical role, particularly in providing expert advice

Much expenditure is avoided for groups that receive in-kind support. Two major categories dominated responses when we asked what in-kind support has been received: practical supplies and technical support (usually from agencies, though not always). Other important in-kind support forms included help with logistics, travel and transport, legal advice (especially for charitable trusts) and financial administration support. Funders that contribute in-kind support help efficiently lift the capacity and capability of teams without the need for applications and administrative processes. It is essential to acknowledge the value of this non-financial support, particularly for groups that are not legal entities (and thus often cannot meet basic criteria to receive financial support).

In-kind support received by groups



Q12. Over the last 12 months, what in-kind support has your group received from councils, businesses, DOC or other sources that support your activities?

These two categories (materials and advice) dominated across all legal entity types and highlighted some important themes, including:

- the possibilities available to support nature conservation that are non-monetary (very relevant to small businesses)
- acknowledgement that much of the technical support provided to groups comes from agencies like DOC and councils. This highlights the interdependency between a robust fiscal future for conservation generally as well as for community-based initiatives.

The time and effort needed to find appropriate funding isn't worth it for many groups

Frustration from groups at the complexity of funding processes was starkly evident. Not only are the processes commonly viewed as cumbersome, but they are also viewed as disproportionately so in that the effort to acquire the funding greatly exceeds its value. The opportunity to enhance the efficiency of fund distribution remains, and we will explore some options later.

It is very dependent on 1 or 2 people in the group committing time to chasing what is often relatively small amounts of funding

All groups really need one person who is happy to spend their precious time ploughing through the ghastly paperwork. Do the people who are paid to create these applications, ever think they could focus on simplifying /streamlining this paperwork to be more user friendly for the applicants?

This has just become a focus due to risk of our funding reducing but it's very challenging as we are up against so many other groups that get more focus.

Many groups have stopped seeking funding because it drains their resources, either from repeated failures or the belief their efforts won't pay off. Many participants report not being sure where to find funding, struggling to apply for it through time-consuming processes and then servicing the reporting requirements thereafter. These challenges are particularly acute when left to volunteers but can occupy a considerable proportion of staff time, too.

Have invested many hours in the first 10 years of pest control and were never granted any funds.....so no longer spend time on applying and spent that time in the field.

I'd really like to see someone provide free info on all conservation funding that is both up to date and regionalised. For e.g. many of the DOC funds are not operating this year, but you only find that out by trawling through each fund (which wastes a lot of time) or you find a fund but it only covers one geographical area.

The current funding and reporting system seems (in the view of the writer) to be one designed to maximize administrative and monitoring costs and to impose unreasonable reporting requirements upon voluntary groups. The writer has recently spent a total of about a week's effort(~40 hours) navigating a complex Council computer-generated system to report upon a very modest \$7,500 grant. For a professionally-qualified person, the effort required exceeds the value of the grant awarded. That does not seem a sensible situation. It could be rectified by placing more emphasis on awarding small grants on the basis of the track record of the grantee/ volunteer group and their overall performance over time. The overall aim should be to minimize overhead costs and maximize outputs.

The short-term nature of funding also results in the same level of effort having to be repeated year after year. More resources would be available to contribute to the sector's environmental and social outcomes if funding processes were more streamlined, long term and if resourcing were more tailored.¹⁴

It is vital that conservation funding is long-term, multi-year funding. Short -term funding increases instability, causes excessive administration and has less impact for the environment if the project is unable to continue.

¹⁴ Such themes are not new and were discussed at length in the 2018 report from PFNZ. A comprehensive analysis by Philanthropy New Zealand published in 2019 also provided a very useful stocktake of funding and funding processes, noting significant room for improvement.

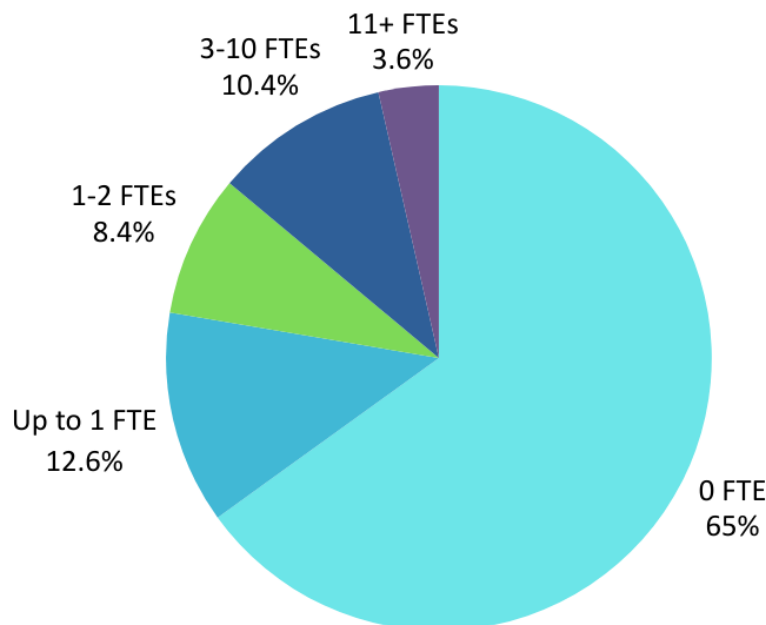
Surveys and interviews revealed that while some improvements have been made, such as lengthening funding terms and shifting funding models, adopting less burdensome engagement models (meetings instead of reports), and making applications online, there are ample opportunities to go further and make these practices more widespread. Non-contestable and annually renewed processes for proven entities were popular and it seems generally administered by councils. Improvements in particular processes, and the efforts of some organisations to improve their processes were noted in the survey and interviews, and they serve as a useful example of innovation.

A large funding process can consume the energy of many groups to make applications, and considering the overall sector burden of this process may help funders streamline. This is especially true when funding buckets are oversubscribed, and many applicants are not awarded despite their efforts. Energy is finite, and reducing time spent on limiting processes leaves more room for practical efforts. More streamlined processes may also help shorten decision-making timeframes for funders, which many respondents noted can be excessively long and sometimes mean the funding is not available when it's needed (e.g. to purchase and plant new plants in-season). It is difficult to ignore, however, that there simply is not enough money.

Most mahi in community conservation is unpaid, meaning it relies on voluntary effort

We aimed to understand more about whether the respondents had paid staff or contractors or whether they relied entirely on volunteers. The next important aspect was to understand how this translated into practice. Nearly two thirds of overall respondents do not employ any staff, while a further 12% (39 respondents) employ 1 FTE or less. Overall, 69 groups report having more than 1 FTE, with 11 (4%) reporting having more than 11 FTE.

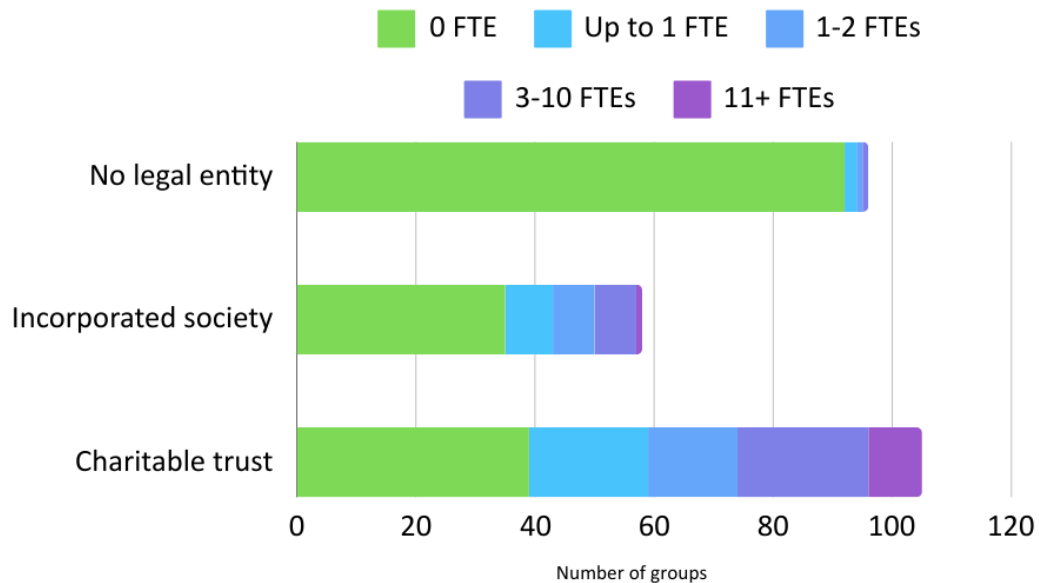
Number of staff employed



trends were largely reversed when these responses were stratified across groups with no legal entity, incorporated societies, and charitable trusts. The vast majority (96%) of groups with no legal entity employ no staff. Incorporated societies exhibited less reliance on staff, with 35 (61%)

reporting they employ no staff, and only 1 reporting having more than 11 FTE. Charitable trusts were more likely to employ staff. Only 39 (37%) reported no staff, while the remainder (63%) had varying numbers of employees. The most common range of staff was between 3 to 10 FTEs. Whether or not staff are present is a key delineation point for groups and is applied to the initial taxonomy suggested in Part 3.

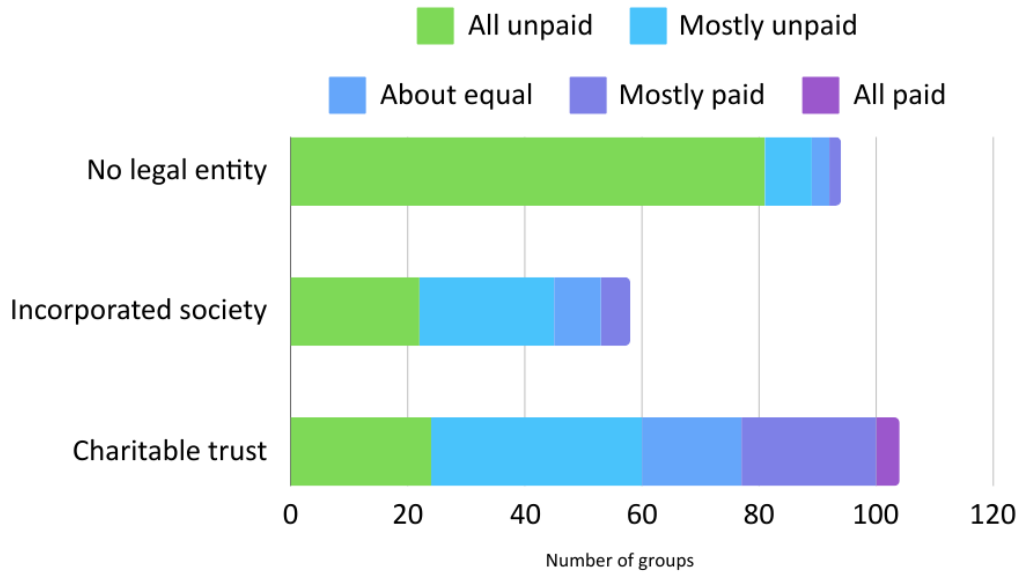
Number of staff employed - by group type



We also asked about the proportion of the group’s work that is carried out by paid vs. unpaid labour. Nearly half of the respondents say their group’s work is all unpaid, 82 (27%) say it is mostly unpaid, and just 6 nationally reported it was ‘all paid’. Given the diversity of groups, a Likert scale was used, and we then stratified the three major legal entity forms.



Paid vs unpaid work - by group type



Overall, most community-based nature conservation is all or primarily voluntary, and where staff members are employed, they are typically very few.

Respondents experience many challenges in finding funding

One in 6 groups report not encountering challenges with funding. For the remainder, however, the concerns with funding are multifaceted, with detailed answers in the comments providing a range of examples (even from those who reported limited concern). Many groups are challenged simply in finding out how to apply for what funding is available, while more than a third note the amount is simply inadequate for the demand. The themes in the graph below were echoed in interviews, with the competition for funding noted as eroding the potential for collaboration.

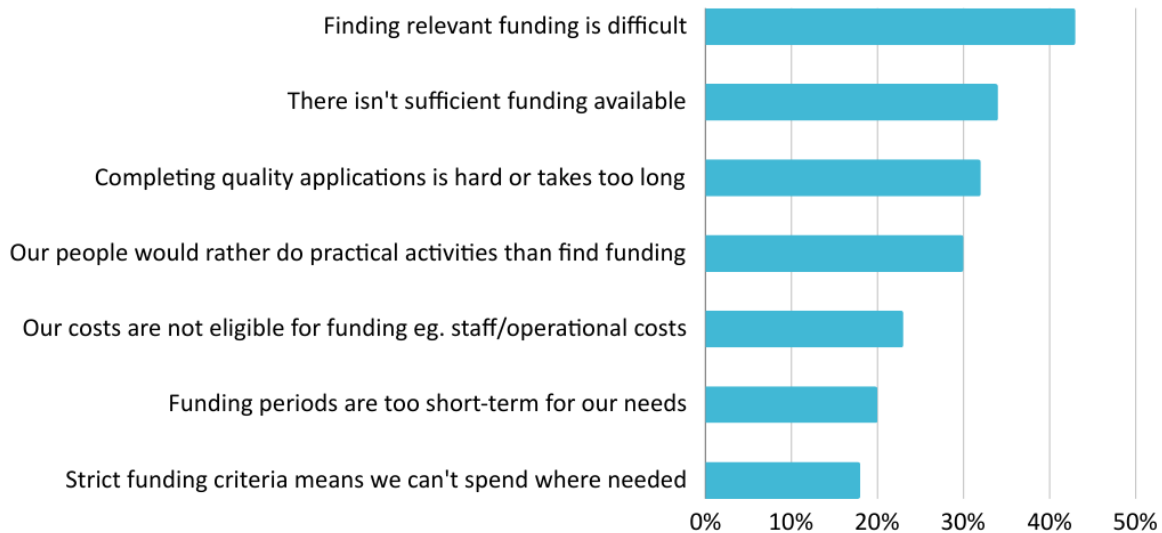
It would be great if all available grants, their important dates and funding available to environmental organisations were collated together for easy access.

Accessible central list of where and when funding is available.

Not having to constantly try and sell the work we do as being superior to groups down the road doing equally as important work. In a finite funding world, the competition means the altruistic view where conservation is the winner is compromised because individuals and groups are just trying to maintain their existing projects. Things like the Fast Track Bill also compromise the goodwill of conservation work because we are back to validating and trying to advocate others valuing the work we do. Wrap around care of individuals and groups undertaking the quiet and often invisible work of plant and animal pest control and reinforcing the difference it makes to our environment on an ongoing basis is important.

Getting groups to collaborate can be challenging as it is not the norm, they are scared of missing out and getting a smaller piece of the pie than they think they would get as an individual entity.

Funding challenges



Q17. What are the key challenges your group or project experiences regarding funding and resourcing your activities?

Funding staff and operational costs is considerably more challenging than materials, events and other smaller scale requirements. This challenge was raised repeatedly in interviews and in many survey responses. It is difficult not just because the expenditure is often not recognised as being important by funders, but the complexity of accumulating enough funding to support roles that are funded often by multiple parties.

Shared funding requirements make staff costs really hard - you can't just hire half a person if you can't get the other half of the funding for their role

Furthermore, funding for staff and operational costs that are short term often constrains the organisation's ability to attract and retain sufficiently qualified staff and to support their career paths adequately. In addition to struggling to cover staff and operational overheads, participants commonly noted other funding challenges such as:

- the short-term nature of funding, which added considerable work and volatility
- the challenge of funding rural restoration work on private property at scale
- the challenge of working across multiple tenures with different pots of funding
- having choices made for them about their work based on alignment with often donor directed criteria with limited basis in science or conservation, instead of what worked best for their endeavour
- the difficulty of coordinating co-funding, partnership investment and other multi-party models particularly where reliant on volunteer time to do so
- respondents were clear that much funding available does not meet their needs, or only partially addresses sector requirements.

- despite voluntary involvement being considerable, many respondents to this survey noted recruitment and retention of volunteers is a key resource limitation, further underlining the need to ensure the value of paid staff and coordination is appreciated by sector supporters.

There isn't enough funding for staff to administer the projects. It is all very well funding plant guards but if you have to have volunteers to order them, transport them and do all the banking and reporting too it is a failure. Planting is the easy bit.

The annual funding cycle is very inefficient and frustrating. Funders like new projects rather than supporting existing programs that are successful. This creates the temptation to chase the funding rather than stay focused on our core vision. It also creates tension with other groups as organisations can stray "out of their lane" to chase funding. We do not have a staff member whose role is to find funding so this task is spread amongst a small team of people who should be focused on their key skills of ecology and communication. This makes the one-year cycle particularly frustrating as we have to do it so regularly. Another frustration is the corporate's love affair with tree planting rather than funding indirect efforts that support ecological restoration. I would love to see a corporate fund a finance manager rather than a tree planting day. There is a lack of funding maturity in the corporate sector. They need to get this message from high up the food chain

The frustrations of respondents are numerous with funding and support, and this has implications for engagement and morale as groups contemplate the future. The next section considers how survey responses and interviews reflect sector mood about what is coming and, most importantly, what can be done to smooth the way.



Question 3: What do we know about their frustrations and ideas for the future?

Key findings about the current state of funding:

- Just knowing what funding is available and how to access it is a key challenge, indicating existing platforms may not be fit for purpose.
- Funding criteria often doesn't match sector need, with key challenges in funding staff and operational costs.
- Short-term funding makes planning and strategising difficult.
- Monitoring is technically challenging, difficult to resource and there is a lack of guidance and accepted models.

The purpose of this question set was to understand the respondents' perspectives on how funding and support for community-led nature conservation could be improved. The sector has a demonstrated track record of sustained commitment and is engaging more and more New Zealanders in grassroots action to safeguard nature.

Many groups face an uncertain future due to a lack of secure funding

Question 14 asked how long the respondents could carry on at current secured levels of funding. Responses show a clear picture of uncertainty and unease. Nearly one-quarter of respondents were 'not sure' how long their group could continue, which could be interpreted in several ways. Another quarter think they can only continue for another year.

Charitable trusts exhibited the greatest expected longevity, with 23 confident they can continue for up to two years, 19 for 2-5 years, and 15 for 5 years or more. Such longevity may well arise out of separate and secure sources of income, especially commercial income such as visitor fees or income from endowment funds or other enduring sources.

Groups that depend little on external funding (either through limited costs, relying on volunteers, self-funding, or both) also predicted being able to continue for a long period, independent of any challenges with funding. For example, of the groups that were not legal entities, nearly a third (27 groups or 30%) think they can continue for more than 5 years.

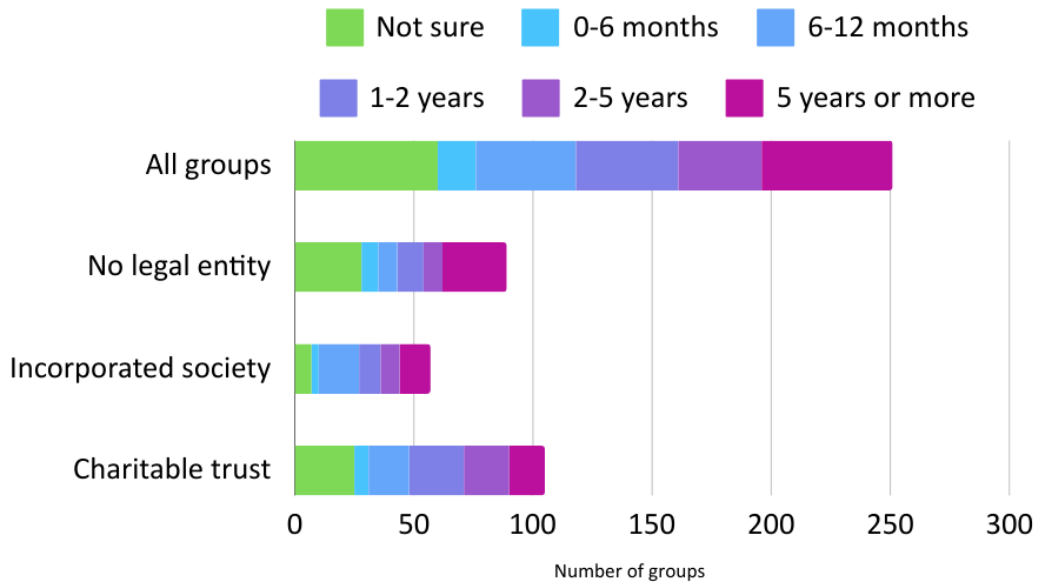
Given we are exclusively run by volunteers (and pay for our own expendables e.g. lures) we could probably maintain a holding pattern for a few years. Clearly expansion would be unlikely without access to funding for more traps etc...

The group will continue for the life of the traps - When the traps start failing, we will require more funding or will cease.

We will keep funding ourselves. We have not sought any funding as we do not have a group bank a/c and can't be bothered with all the red tape.

So long as I keep buying bait, and our team keeps maintaining the traps on a volunteer basis as we do now, we can continue indefinitely.

Anticipated group longevity - by group type



Q14. At the current level of secured funding, how long can your group continue?

It is important to acknowledge the sector’s reliance on volunteer effort places it in just as precarious a position as navigating a funding shortfall. Overall, a considerable proportion of the sector faces either a reduction in scale (based on comments and interviews) or the end of their operations within the next 6-12 months. This indicates that part of the sector is in real financial trouble without further funding and support.

While some groups are certain they can persist in the current funding environment, many highlighted how tricky it was to plan, given that most funding is short-term.

The funding model is completely contradictory to long term planning. It is hand to mouth which makes it extremely challenging to provide medium to long term security around contracts, etc.

Most funders only offer grants for 1 year, so it's a constant job to keep reporting on those grants and applying for the next one.

No funding is secure, we operate year by year, project by project as funds allow.

Many grants and contracts are for 12month period, with no guarantee of renewal. Diversity of income from other sources helps to maintain operations.

Hard to plan long term when we funding availability is unstable depending on the government.

Many groups need more support with demonstrating their value and telling their story

Interviews and the literature demonstrate that funders look for cogent stories and strong value propositions and often do not find them in community conservation. Respondents said how hard it was to demonstrate the value of their contribution to potential and current funders. 'Value' comprises all the outputs and outcomes arising from the activities, such as changes in biodiversity indicators, attitudes, social cohesion, the number of rodents killed, the hours of work put in by staff and volunteers, and any other variables. Some of these metrics are much easier to demonstrate than others, and funders have very different expectations about how groups should report on their activities and what metrics are most important.

The responses were surprisingly positive compared with the tenor of the free text contributions. The majority noted it was easy (31%) or very easy (22%) or neutral (21%). The free text responses reflected that there are more concerns, however, indicating that some groups probably need support to tell their story more than they realise. This is not helped by high levels of turnover in agencies that fund conservation, meaning relationships must be repeatedly brokered.

The most common need for support was helping groups to understand what and how to monitor. Next, groups wanted support in presenting information effectively and sharing their stories. They also mentioned their volunteers often did not have capacity to do more monitoring because it diverted them from core mahi.

A further key issue raised was the need for funders to recognise the value of group efforts and to make more effort to visit groups and build a more personal relationship where practicable, helping to overcome the need for time-consuming paperwork, especially at a small scale. Several suggestions were made for a common platform to upload results for their local area, viewable to the public and funders, perhaps administered by their regional council.

Many free text comments reflected that community-led initiatives often feel that their efforts are not recognised fairly.

I think it's hugely important that volunteer hours are built into reports from groups, so their contribution can be quantified. I get the sense that volunteers and community groups are still regarded as tinkering around the edges, while 'paid experts' are doing the real work.

If we knew what metrics were useful it wouldn't be hard to collect them.

With limited funding, the key priority is completing predator control on the ground. To increase our capacity for monitoring and reporting, we would need funders that specifically fund that (including staff time), but most funders only want to fund direct things like volunteer work on the ground.

Better processes to log data/information. Helpful and simple templates.

Several groups raised the importance of broader metrics, noting that while they can easily count animals trapped, it is sometimes harder to convey ecological, social and other outcomes. Funders can be highly variable in their expectations of monitoring (and whether they will allow monitoring of outcomes to be funded within project costs or in addition). Groups that receive funding from multiple sources must also juggle those varied expectations.

Many respondents feel the contribution of community conservation is not respected

In addition to technical and capability barriers to demonstrating value, many respondents noted their frustration at the interface with agency staff, who appeared to dismiss their efforts. This sentiment shone clearly through in interviews, with several interviewees noting that agencies often took a 'command and control' approach rather than empowering groups, resulting in a strained relationship.

Better communication from our apparently overloaded Parks department; site visits/meaningful discussion, respect for skill levels and work done.

Being seen as a valuable partner by Govt organisations, which is reflected by open communication, support and having emails replied to in a timely manner.

Help stop DOC obstructing local people who want to work with DOC on their land. They have too much influence on public land especially where the public are keen to improve it for public use.

Respondents are keen for agencies to provide more leadership, support and to appreciate the technical advice they do receive.¹⁵ Respondents noted better information about priorities and key areas to focus on would help them to operate with more confidence.

A national weed management strategy would help enormously. There isn't a clear picture or management plan for - it is all very ad hoc. Groups like ours have to do everything with no overview or strategy at a local or national level.

A localized register of at-risk catchments with detailed analysis of what the issues are.

Further, many responses noted that agencies' efforts had lowered in some areas, which meant that they had more work to do with even less support. Examples of attrition include reduced pest control on the land in question or adjacent areas, which puts pressure on community efforts, more limited funding, or less engagement overall.

DOC has been a significant partner in the past. Both in terms of community funding and supporting work with departmental control operations. This seems to be reducing dramatically.

For new larger scale predator project the funding appears to have dried up. For example, PF2050 Ltd now have very limited funding for research or project support. Philanthropy also appears to be only supporting existing projects. It is not clear what DOC is up to. So do not have much to offer.

Community groups are now carrying out the roles that DOC as an entity, should be doing but DOC no longer supports the community groups. How about just giving the DOC funding direct to the community groups and cut them out of the picture? Seriously, if DOC were funded appropriately, and administrated better,

¹⁵ Several respondents in interviews noted that it is an assumption that agencies have more expertise than groups when in some instances, there is more ecological expertise in the group. Groups and landowners in this position often felt patronised, with one citing they felt like they were treated as 'minions of the Department'. Many anecdotal comments throughout this research show that some agencies require culture changes to ensure they are playing their part in 'empowering action' and fostering effective relationships.

and were led better than the appalling list of hopeless Ministers that we have had since, oh yeah, DOC began, then this survey would not be in existence.

Respondents noted the attrition in government efforts, including how it manifests locally.

Over 4,000 of New Zealand's native species are classified as threatened or at risk of extinction. With ongoing reductions in the Department of Conservation's operational budget, community conservation groups are increasingly taking the lead in safeguarding our precious taonga. Countless volunteer hours are dedicated to this mission, emphasizing the need for agency support to ensure successful and sustained protection. Without these funds, we may lose some of our region's unique and highly threatened species forever.

Within NZ at present cuts on government conservation and environmental agencies will place further need for NGOs and community groups to take on work although it is unlikely there will be an increase in funds available for these groups. In the biodiversity crisis we are currently in it is important that community groups can collaborate towards common goals with tangible outcomes for the native species we aim to protect.

Our group is working in key environmentally areas with significant SEAs and BFAs, where Council and DOC have little resources to maintain them. We would like more support for the work we do in their areas of responsibility.

Having been on both sides of funding applications I know how much they are oversubscribed. Really good applications are declined not on merit but on lack of money. There needs to be a greater financial input from central government if PF2050 is going to come anywhere near completion.

One salient note The ambitious goal of Predator Free 2050 was a national government initiative, so its time they put their money where their mouth is and continued funding for predator control projects. No one has an expectation that the The Road to Zero or the now canned Smokefree NZ initiatives would be funded by any entity other than the government so why should this be different?

Strategically, New Zealand's burgeoning reliance on scattered and weakly resourced efforts to safeguard biodiversity must be urgently addressed. The current funding and support system is clearly not fit for purpose.

Part 4: Key shifts to improve the funding and support of community conservation

1

Enhance cooperation and alignment to improve impact

2

Efficient funding models, tailored to sector needs

3

Help groups to demonstrate their impact

4

Boost investment including through exploring alternatives

The key shifts set out below are four important areas where more action can be taken at a practical level to support community conservation. Many groups, agencies and funders may be aligning with the recommendations or some of the recommendations already, representing valuable examples for the rest to follow. What is needed is making cooperation, efficient funding, outcome monitoring and boosted resourcing the norm across the sector. And this will take collective effort.

Key shift 1: Enhance cooperation and alignment to improve impact

Relationships mean so much in community conservation. The relationships between groups, as they work towards common overarching goals, have important implications for funding, and effective working relationships generate efficiencies by aligning efforts. Relationships between conservation efforts and funders, with agencies and with iwi and hapū are also crucial.

Being connected and collaborative is important to existing and potential funders. A New Zealand-based analysis of business expectations in contributing to nature conservation made clear the importance of recipients of business support having a clear plan, being coordinated at a landscape scale, and being able to demonstrate their benefits (SBN, 2023). These may increase the likelihood that business will support community conservation while meeting expectations such as those related to TNFD (Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures) and other drivers.

More collaborative approaches also help create demand-side efficiencies. Many smaller groups were able to shed administrative burdens by working under an umbrella and being supported in their mahi by an entity that would 'take the load' administratively.

How do we achieve this shift?

Funding for community conservation is likely easier to attract when strategic alignment with agencies and other efforts can be demonstrated. Funding and support will also be much easier to retain when success is demonstrable through monitoring. Achieving these outcomes at scale will require a level of cooperation that is not currently in place in many areas of the country, not only between groups but also with agencies, iwi and hapū, landowners and the private sector.

Throughout the survey, including the free text responses and woven through many interviews, there is a clear frustration with the relationship between conservation agencies and the sector, most notably the Department of Conservation. There is an inherent power imbalance between a community-based group and a statutory agency, and there is considerable variation in how that relationship plays out from exceptional and constructive to strained and frustrating. There is clear room for improvement at the interface of agencies and the community, which will require effort from both sides to broker and maintain.

Working together more effectively and respecting the role the different players play helps set a solid foundation for good outcomes for nature.

What groups can do

- join the local hub or collective where available, which can help especially smaller groups limit administration burden, magnify their impact or otherwise ensure alignment and cooperation can be demonstrated
- cooperate with agencies and others to address key conservation priorities where possible (particularly where public funding is drawn on)
- align plans and goals with strategic documents such as national, regional and local biodiversity plans, strategies and focus areas, in addition to international priorities
- when seeking funding for staff and overheads, ensure the benefits are clearly articulated and an agreed approach to monitoring outcomes is in place at the outset
- build staff and overhead costs into project costing on application and point out dependencies.

What agencies can do

- ensure staff charged with engagement responsibilities have the skills and resources (and necessary autonomy) to broker enduring relationships
- limit turnover at the interface, which can be very disruptive to relationships and drain additional energy from the community and others
- ensure community efforts are recognised and acknowledged, particularly where they contribute to statutory outcomes
- consider opportunities to simplify and streamline requirements for community conservation initiatives in interacting with the legal framework within that agency's jurisdiction
- ensure strategic planning processes take account of community-led efforts and provide useful insight and direction to stakeholders outside the organisation
- continue provision of crucial coordination and technical support which is critical and deeply appreciated
- consider the interplay of biodiversity prioritisation and community conservation funding carefully, potentially developing dedicated funding for activities with primarily social benefits that do not displace biodiversity outcomes

What funders (and potential funders) can do

- support hubs and collectives with long term and fit for purpose funding to provide coordination and foundational assistance for community conservation efforts
- recognise the value of paid staff and operational funding in providing a stable basis for coordinating volunteers, developing strategy, administration and outcomes monitoring
- ensure expectations of cooperation and alignment are reasonable and proportional to the circumstances and how they will be assessed for evaluation purposes
- consider the provision of technical support or other in-kind contributions if financial support is not easy to provide (e.g., for small businesses)
- collaborate between themselves to support the sector to do the same – in particular to streamline co-funding arrangements.



Key shift 2: Efficient funding models, tailored to sector needs

Conservation is a long game. Sustained and long-term funding models are the only realistically effective models for biodiversity conservation carried out by community-led groups and agencies alike. In the current economic model, such settings are naturally challenging to establish and maintain. The growing scale and complexity of community conservation efforts require more baseline operational funding, flexible funding models, and better collaboration among funders to match needs effectively.

Where support has been provided and funding is later lost, it's important to recognise that so too are outcomes, often very quickly. Examples of areas where progress can be lost due to inconsistent or truncated funding include increases in pest density to prior levels (this can occur very quickly), the smothering of new plantings due to an absence of effective weed control, mechanical damage from poor track maintenance, reduced community engagement and loss of continuous datasets.

In a hostile funding environment, it's vital that resourcing that is available is transferred efficiently and in a targeted way to where it matters. It is important to be clear about the diversity of players in community conservation and how those differences translate into appropriate models for delivery of funding and support. Part 3 contains a suggested initial taxonomy to support this.

Funding processes are often cumbersome, disproportionate to the level of funding available and inflexible, with funding periods typically being short-term and requiring repeat reapplications and constant 'dressing up' of business-as-usual endeavours to attract and retain support. These observations are neither novel nor confined to conservation. From the survey, we can see that funding commonly has criteria that doesn't align with groups' needs

It is possible that the very high demand for funding, and thus the continual over-subscription of available funds, makes funders think there is no merit in making it easier to apply by improving their processes. They may think it is likely to result in even further volumes of applications. At a sector level, a single large funding process has the unfortunate potential to divert considerable effort away from core mahi. Particularly complex funding processes can absorb much effort from eventually successful applicants, and a significant amount of time from those that will not be funded. The overall number of hours in the sector devoted to a single process from a large funder can be very considerable and has its own strategic impact that should be considered. It may be that funders can explore the following as an alternative to maintaining the status quo

- Distributing small amounts of funding via hubs and collectives as is commonly the case in some parts of the country
- Having a first step of expressions of interest in funding, with complex applications invited from a subset of groups that pass coarse filters at the outset
- Funding groups directly in a non-contestable way where they are proven entities, avoiding the need for applications
- Providing materials directly on an allocation or as needed basis, avoiding applications and verification of purchase

How do we achieve this shift?

What groups can do

Funders and agencies both communicated the need for groups to have clearer notions of what they want to achieve, cooperate with other parties and demonstrate their impact. To improve efficiencies, groups can:

- have a clear plan of what they want to achieve and source support and funding strategically to address those outcomes
- ensure they are joined up in their efforts where possible, particularly if a hub or collective is operating in their area and they are small and would benefit from that association
- consider their techniques and strategies to ensure they are efficient and fit for purpose, including incorporating best practice, new knowledge and technology.

What agencies can do

Agencies operate as strategic leads, regulatory bodies, and funders for community conservation organisations. In refining funding to match sector needs, agencies can:

- ensure their own funding programmes model effective approaches to supporting conservation endeavours that other funders can learn from
- support funders to understand how best to deploy their contributions
- consider the mix of contestable and non-contestable funding they offer and whether it is appropriate for their jurisdiction
- make application forms simpler and more consistent between funders (e.g., across central government and across local government) and avoid continual changes to format
- find innovative ways to support groups in their work, alleviating administration burden
- ensure transparency when an agency is exercising different functions (funder vs regulator, system steward compared with contract management), as the interface can be confusing.

What funders can do

Funders should carefully consider how they distribute their funds and what their requirements may cumulatively add to at both an application and a sector level. There are also potentially technological solutions that could be investigated. Overall however, funding conservation activities is most efficient at a sector level where:

- criteria are clear, easy to find, and the application scale is proportional to the circumstances, including level of funding and degree of risk
- criteria are an honest reflection of the likelihood of award by declaring conventions of the fund's approach to giving (e.g., don't profess to fund environmental matters but have no intent or track record of doing so)
- it is easy for potential applicants to assess their eligibility, including perhaps by a light touch expression of interest process or an informal pre-application discussion
- is mindful of the scale and resources of the applicants to contend with weighty application processes, including at a sector level¹⁶
- requirements do not refer to outdated practices, such as the need for the submission of hard copies, unless strictly necessary

¹⁶ The cumulative impact of a large funding process at a sector level is usually significant in terms of embedded energy. This is increased when the fund is over-subscribed, and many groups are not funded despite their efforts. Ways to narrow the gateway and manage expectations can be very useful.

- payment processes that avoid approaches such as paying on reimbursement, which put an unfair financial burden on the fund recipient
- promotes positive engagement, particularly where they save time and are appropriate for both parties (a funder visit or roundtable meeting vs a written report requirement)
- funding processes are scaled proportionally for the small groups or lower-risk activities, including funding via hubs for efficiency
- application forms are consistent between funders (e.g., across central government and across local government) and avoid continual changes to format
- reporting requirements are standardised wherever possible and preferably allow reports to be produced and submitted for multiple funds (especially financial reports)
- it enables multi-year contracts/funding agreements with groups that have shown themselves capable and have performed (e.g., 5-10 years)



Key shift 3: Help groups demonstrate impact through outcome monitoring

A prevailing concern with community conservation¹⁷ is whether it delivers outcomes for people and the environment. The interviews illustrated that many experts and funders remained sceptical about the effectiveness of groups in the sector, and this view is only likely to be swayed with sustained evidence of outcomes. Moving the focus from inputs and outputs (hours worked, trap catch) to measurable changes in social, ecological and other metrics will have strategic benefits.

The willingness of businesses to support nature conservation has been explored in a 2023 survey by the Sustainable Business Network. The results found that being confident of outcomes was a key contingency to improving funding, noting:

'...70% of businesses said that their investment in on-the-ground nature projects will increase in the next five years. Their preference was to invest in activity-based nature projects such as planting. In return for this investment, businesses wanted to see standardised impact statistics and opportunities for direct engagement with the project' (SBN, 2023)

Measuring outcomes is crucially important to boost investment in community conservation. If we can achieve a level of confidence with what the work is achieving, it will:

- (a) justify the contribution of agencies with funding and in-kind support from strained budgets intended for biodiversity
- (b) increase and retain volunteer enthusiasm by demonstrating when changes are being made for species and ecosystems
- (c) attract more diverse funding by having a strong value proposition rooted in evidence.

There is a lack of research and analysis into community conservation activities and effectiveness at scale, and site-based data is highly variable. In New Zealand, there is limited research on improving conservation methods, adoption, effectiveness and new monitoring techniques. Addressing this ambiguity is key. Scepticism about the (particularly ecological) outcomes is likely a major barrier to broadening funding sources, such as from businesses. Thus while some of the information gaps can be filled by groups, there are likely associated scientific research gaps that need to be addressed in tandem.

How do we achieve this shift?

What support looks like for different groups to better monitor outcomes will likely differ depending on the scale at which they operate, the type of resources already available to them, and how agencies already support them. Overall, it's clear respondents need more help in this space.

What groups can do

- ensure they have a plan and a framework for monitoring the outcomes of their activities from the outset (baseline monitoring is powerful information)
- build consistent and repeatable monitoring into their project work in the most efficient way possible (e.g., try to monitor activities 'as they go' alongside their day-to-day activities to enhance efficiencies)
- seek advice on appropriate methods, via local experts or agencies
- consider technology that can support effective information recording (e.g. apps, cameras).

¹⁷ The lack of site-based monitoring is also not confined to community conservation and is a pervasive issue with conservation more generally. It is important to have fair expectations of the scale of outcome monitoring.

What agencies can do

- provide support to both funders and groups to understand useful metrics and ways to demonstrate value that are defensible and consistent
- ensure science and technical expertise is maintained internally
- adopt consistent and best practice expectations of outcome monitoring in their own work and in the work they fund in the community
- contribute to capability building in community conservation to improve monitoring skills
- develop standard and practical impact indicators to assist with monitoring
- consider undertaking the monitoring on behalf of community groups (with permission) as part of their contribution. Relieves groups of the burden and ensures consistency.
- develop shared platforms and databases to support community conservation to share the results of their mahi and demonstrate their contribution to wider goals.
- address key scientific and technical knowledge gaps about effectiveness of different conservation interventions and related topics.

What funders can do

- support groups, including hubs and collectives, to resource monitoring by allowing the costs associated with it to form part of application requests
- consider ways to support monitoring and demonstrating value to occur in efficient and innovative ways (e.g., smarter use of emerging technologies)
- ensure monitoring and reporting is genuinely necessary, being careful not to impose significant and disproportionate burdens, particularly if the information is not likely to be read
- consider aligning reporting requirements with other funders or finding other efficiencies
- appreciate the importance of operational costs as providing the bedrock for effective outcome monitoring by groups, including staff.

Key shift 4: Boost investment including through alternative funding options

An inescapable aspect of this research is that the funding available for community conservation is outstripped by the demand. While some improvements could be made in demand-side management through enhanced cooperation and more efficient fund distribution models, the pie is simply not big enough. Respondents highlighted several factors worsening the already challenging funding environment: the end or withdrawal of pandemic funding, inflationary pressures, reduced funding and support from key agencies and the growing urgency of maintaining current progress.

It is important to recognise that public sources of funding for conservation are increased and protected from attrition and cost shifting: most conservation is publicly funded in some form, and this is unlikely to change in the current economic system. However, there are opportunities to augment that funding from other sources. These require careful examination and evaluating their suitability may not be something individual groups are well-placed to do.

Traditional sources of funding (e.g., grants from agencies) are not sufficient to meet demand, so landowners, organisations and others are exploring alternative options. Common options include brokering partnerships with local, regional and national (e.g., tourism entities as an example), selling materials like traps and guided walks, running events and other fundraising initiatives and the fledgling opportunities in the impact investment space related to biodiversity. More novel initiatives are also being developed, particularly related to the interplay of biodiversity and climate change.

While slow to build, the growing importance of funding from the business and philanthropic sectors has been evident in the past five years, even considering the ‘one-off’ investment of Jobs for Nature. The sector needs alternate forms of funding, and there is growing enthusiasm in the business community to support nature regeneration (Rowland, 2023). Hopefully, these concurrent trends can be combined to provide a more stable footing for conservation going forward.

Many groups want to limit their heavy reliance on grants-based and short term funding by pursuing alternative sources. But how prospective are they?

How do we achieve this shift?

Each community conservation initiative, from landowner-led restoration to large-scale efforts on public land, will need to determine what options suit them best. This section briefly considers some other options that groups have in place or are considering, as well as what groups should be aware of when exploring them. This report does not endorse these methods but rather seeks to highlight considerations that groups and landowners could make in determining whether the income source has potential for them. Further advice, including legal, financial and ecological, is likely necessary.

It is important to note that this advice is neither expert nor fulsome. More work on the pathways for realistic financial support for conservation activities is likely needed, as much information in existence is available from proponents of the new schemes, rather than independent experts.

Options selected as examples of potential income sources canvassed are:

- a. contracts for services
- b. endowment funds and bequests
- c. mitigation and offset funding
- d. voluntary carbon credits.

At a sector level, it's crucial to recognise that some community conservation initiatives will require support to transition to alternative funding sources at scale. Agencies and funders should consider a

combined approach to explore alternative income streams, providing useful insights and support including technical guidance and standards.

a. Contracts for services

Community groups seek and obtain contracts with agencies and the private sector to deliver services usually delivered by commercial entities (e.g., weed control in community parks).

Groups diversifying their funding sources by pursuing commercial-style contracts to deliver services need to consider:

- how taking on contracts may alter the relationship they have with the agency, other community groups and their own volunteers
- whether they can comply with the procurement policies of the relevant agency or entity that is contracting the work
- whether they have the necessary skills, knowledge and contingencies in place for labour to complete the works
- whether and how they can ensure that all relevant legal requirements and key performance indicators can be met
- how income-generating activities may impact their legal status and obligations (such as Charities Commission).

b. Endowment funds

Endowment funds are usually large sums invested, usually by fund managers including community foundations, where interest payments are paid out often to support ongoing running costs or other expenditure.

When considering this approach, groups should be mindful of:

- what funding available or accessible can be used to establish an endowment fund
- what funding is available to sustain the organisation in the time it takes to establish an endowment fund
- what support they can access in establishing an endowment fund, including legal and fund management expertise (e.g. organisations that manage endowments on behalf of groups)
- whether the vision and plan for the work they are doing are sufficiently long-term and clear to potential contributors
- the need to continue to build the endowment fund, which may take a considerable time to reach a quantum that gives a meaningful return (and capital funds cannot usually be drawn down except in certain exceptional circumstances)
- whether the principal is large enough that the expected return will cover sufficient operating costs to be worthwhile.

c. Resource management mitigation funding and similar arrangements

One-off or regular payments from developers or resource users as a requirement of a statutory permission, such as a resource consent.

Groups in receipt of funding or support from developments for this reason need to consider:

- the content of the relevant consent or permit that requires the payment and whether any conditions relate to how the money may be spent and what the implications are of the group being funded to meet regulatory obligations

- the governance structure for the management of the funding and its use initially/over time
- what reporting will be required and to whom
- the implications of any change in strategy or management of the group for their eligibility to continue to receive the funding
- how the source of the funding may alter the relationship with the community, other groups and volunteers.

d. Voluntary carbon credits

Potential income is based on verifiable units of value that reflect or are intended to reflect the sequestration of carbon as a result of activities. Eligibility and entry requirements vary considerably.

Considerations include whether:

- There is legal claim over the land relevant to credits (if you are not the landowner, you are unlikely to be able to claim any outcomes)
- Whether costs of participation are feasible and affordable (e.g., administration and verification processes)
- Whether activities meet the rules of the scheme (e.g., requirements to manage and protect in perpetuity and long-term liability for failure)
- the additionality of actions can be demonstrated against baselines
- how deriving funding from this source may impact other sources of income or support including community support



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Appendix 1 Survey questions

Question	Purpose of the question	Critical Review
1. Are you part of a community-led group or project involved in nature conservation in New Zealand?	The purpose of this question was to screen out community-based organisations or other potential participants that are part of an initiative that is not described as being involved in 'nature conservation'.	Clear filter questions are particularly useful when a survey is published widely (e.g. on social media) to minimise non-target responses.
2. Group or project name. Please complete this survey from the perspective of one group or project you represent.	To reduce duplication and ensure that no one group had an unreasonable proportion of the influence on the survey.	There were only very minimal double ups. Respondents were advised to fill the survey in separately for each group rather than combine responses and this seemed to work well.
3. Where in New Zealand is your group or project based?	The purpose was to ensure that the survey represented the broader country, rather than drew responses from any particular area.	Manawatu-Whanganui Region was mistakenly left off the list and the 'Other' category saw 9 groups identified as being active in that region. Just 8 groups noted they had a nationwide focus, with the vast majority being regionally or locally based.
4. Where does your group or project work? This might be a particular reserve, park, landscape area, neighbourhood or other.	The purpose of this question was to gain an understanding of how each group or project interacts with nature conservation and on what terms.	Given the scale of response, assessing these free text responses was somewhat onerous, but did demonstrate the increasing complexity of work.
5. What are your group or project's main goals or focus areas? Choose all that apply.	Understanding what most groups did helped assess the activity types that occur in the sector.	The initial distribution list being PFNZ may account in part for the bias toward animal pest control. However, absent any universal information sharing platform, it is likely unavoidable.
6. How long has your group or project been active?	Understanding the maturity of the sector is a rough approximation of community commitment.	Future studies could drill down further into this question, particularly to understand how groups evolve and what factors most secure their longevity.
7. How many people participate in your group or project's activities at least once in a standard month? (Including you)	Understanding the level of engagement of groups provides useful hints as to their scale, sustainability and visibility.	The refinements used such as asking about a 'standard month' helped limit skew.
8. How has the scale of your project changed in the last five years (2019-2024)? For example, the number of people involved, the amount or diversity of work, or the spatial scale.	This question was somewhat unavoidably nebulous.	Giving a specific and recent timeframe hopefully supported groups to answer factually, although it did rely on a level of historical knowledge of the group's efforts which many may not have.
9. In the past 12 months, how much total funding has your group or project received (including self-funding)?	Funding alone is a weak approximation for scale, especially when staff costs are considered. Nevertheless, it provides an indication of funding demand.	On reflection the category \$25-100,000 could have been divided into two. It is possible that the main axis of delineation in costs is whether a project employs staff or not, as this significantly increases regular operating costs.
10. Over the past 12 months, what sources	A diverse range of funding sources provides groups with a certain level of	Categories could have been defined or more clearly delineated.

have contributed funding to your group or project? Choose all that apply.	resilience. Understanding if this is broad or narrow is useful.	
11. What are your group's most important or impactful funding sources from the list above? Why?	Ensuring there was a way to identify key funding was important.	A useful question. Categories should have exactly matched Q10 however.
12. Over the last 12 months, what in-kind support has your group received from councils, businesses, DOC or other sources that support your activities? Choose all that apply.	In kind support is disproportionately important to small groups and important overall. It is important not to be too focused on dollars.	Further studies could unpack this further.
13. How many hours per month does your group or project spend looking for or applying for funding?	This question needed to be phrased differently to elicit useful information.	It was difficult to consider how that compared with the overall amount of 'desk time' for groups and future questions could help determine the relative significance.
14. At the current level of secured funding, how long can your group continue?	Understanding the funding environment is short term and volatile, it is noted that some groups may technically only have funding for a short while but be sure they can persist in some form.	A key concern in the community conservation sector is that funding attrition will leave many groups without the support they need to continue.
15. How has your funding situation changed in the past five years (2019-2024)?	Change in scale was evident.	The focus of this question was on funding quantum rather than source or any other related issue.
16. What is your group's funding mainly used for? Choose up to 5.	Understanding what the need for funding is important for funders.	Many groups undertake a diverse range of activities, but this question restricted them to 5. It is possible that other activities were excluded. Respondents that completed the 'other' field however, primarily listed kit and supplies which were the dominant category anyway. The main additional category was transport and travel, and future surveys should recognise this expenditure as being important.
17. What are the key challenges your group or project experiences regarding funding and resourcing your activities? Choose all that apply.	Understanding the most commonly cited issues can help prioritise action.	The way this question was designed ran the risk of being leading, but it is important to recognise that many of these challenges are well known and have been extensively documented.
18. How easy is it to demonstrate the value of your group's efforts to potential and current funders?	Interviews and literature demonstrate scepticism about sector value-add.	This question might have been better asked differently focusing on the reception of funders to value demonstrated to date. However, the free text responses clearly demonstrated concerns abound.
19. What would make it easier?	Elicit what respondents consider would support them to tell their story.	This question was perhaps a little vague, but gave respondents flexibility to share as much as they'd like.
20. What other support would help?	Understand the broader context for community conservation and what	Phrasing this question more specifically may have jogged more detailed responses. A couple of respondents noted it felt repetitive

	challenges respondents need support with.	indicating they thought it linked back to the two previous questions.
21. What best describes your legal status	Understanding the legal structures of those applying for funding helps fine tune support.	Three categories clearly dominate, but a range of structures are emerging.
22. Are you part of a hub or collective? If so, which one/s?	As a proxy for collaboration this question aimed to understand the affiliation with umbrella groups.	Including a definition of hub and collective was considered, but we were hesitant to restrict the answers.
23. Does your organisation employ staff? If so, how many?	Understanding the level of staffing in the sector reflects reliance on voluntary labour.	Explanatory text so people understood what 'FTE' meant was useful and the question was well answered.
24. What proportion of your work is paid v unpaid?	This question was designed to understand the relative reliance on funding v volunteers.	It was likely difficult for some groups to capture their full activities and determine a quantitative answer. As such, we used a Likert scale.

