

Mobilising for Nature

Understanding and actions report

TRA X DOC
April 2025

TRA



This report covers key findings from research into how New Zealanders think about nature and the actions they are taking to protect it.

A mixed methodology for data collection: The findings from this report are an amalgamation of both robust quantitative data (from over 2000 New Zealanders representative of the population), and in-depth qualitative focus groups with another 60 New Zealanders including targeted groups with Māori.

Quantitative Segmentation Survey

- 10-minute online survey
- 18+ New Zealanders
- All Panel sample
- Fieldwork: 28 Feb – 14 March 2025
- Total n = 2316 completes
- Final data post weighted to be representative of NZ 18+.

Qualitative Focus Groups

- A total of 60 New Zealanders
 - 12 x 90-minute online groups:
 - 10 x Understanding groups (Focused on enriching our understanding of people's connection to nature), 3x low/no action, 3x mid action, 1 high action
 - 2 x Testing groups (focused solely on testing the creative stimulus), 1x no/low/mid action and 1x high action
- 15-minute pre-task for Understanding groups
- 3x Māori Understanding groups for each level of action
- Fieldwork: 26 March – 11 April 2025

Throughout the report significant differences between demographic groups have been called out. DOC's domestic customer segmentation was also drawn from as a lens to understanding how New Zealanders take action for nature. The segments referred to include 6 segments: Mindful Actives, Social Actives, Enthusiastic Actives, Stimulation Actives, Home Close Actives, and Other Things Actives.

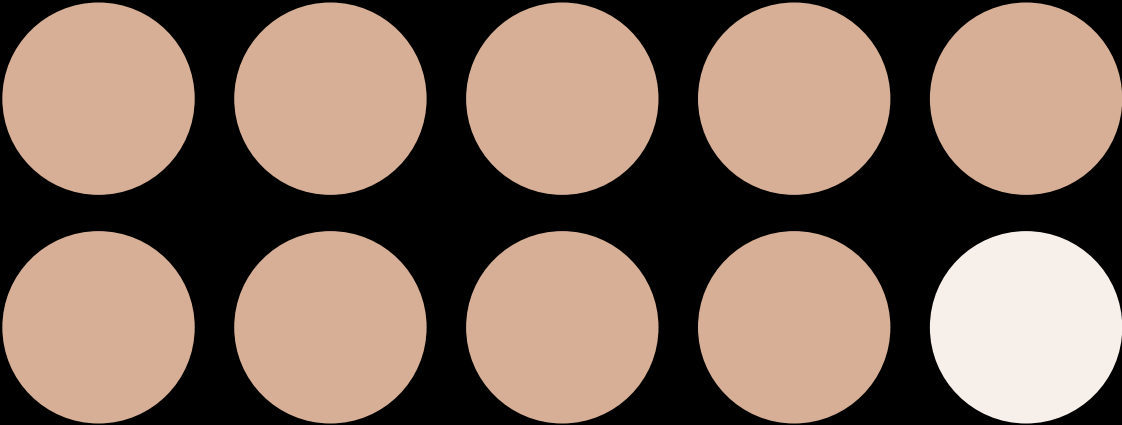
DOC Domestic Customer Segmentation source links:

- New Zealanders in the outdoors: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/role/visitor-research/new-zealanders-in-the-outdoors.pdf>
- New Zealanders and the environment: <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/role/visitor-research/nzers-and-the-environment.pdf>

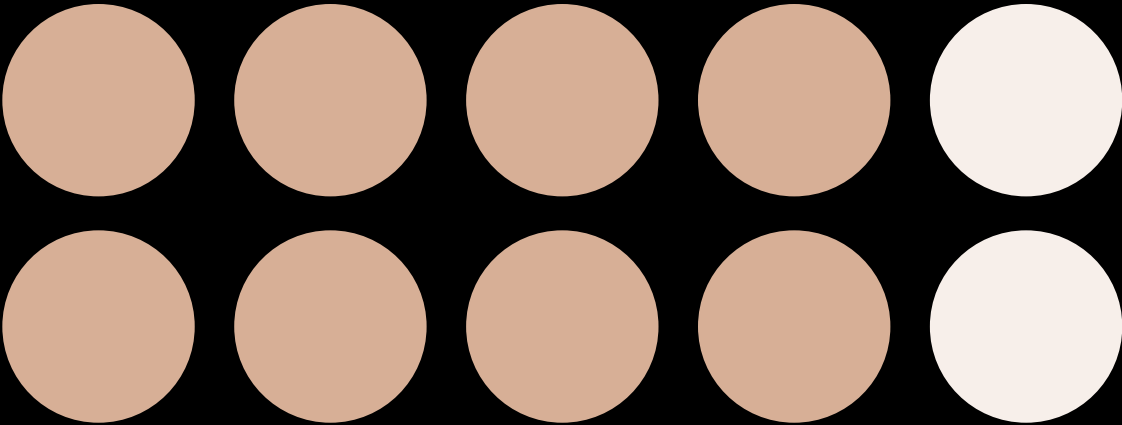
Understanding the context



1



For 9/10, nature is seen as part of everyday life.



For 8/10, nature is inherently reciprocal.

It is seen as part of our way of life, and manifests in different ways for different people

<div>Nature is part of our everyday lives</div> <div>88%</div>	<div>Connecting with nature enhances wellbeing</div> <div>87%</div>	<div>As humans we are part of nature</div> <div>88%</div>	<div>Nature is where we connect with whānau</div> <div>62%</div>
<div>Antidote to modern life</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">— Quiet vs. noisy: Offers a peaceful, quiet environment, contrasting with the noise and hustle of urban life.— Scenery vs. screens: Provides a break from the constant screen time of modern living.— Spacious vs. crowded: Nature offers a sense of open space, unlike the crowded, confined feeling often experienced in cities.— Green vs. concrete: Nature is abundant with greenery, offering a stark contrast to the concrete and man-made structures of urban areas.— Calm vs. stress: Time in nature provides a calming, stress-relieving effect, in contrast to the stress and pressure of modern life.</div>	<div>Healing and restorative</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">— Emotionally and mentally to heal stress: Nature provides a space for emotional and mental healing, offering a break from stress and promoting mental well-being.— Physical engagement: Engaging with nature through physical activities, like walking or hiking, is seen to improve overall health.— Awe inspiring: Nature encourages exploration, sparking awe and wonder that broadens perspectives.— Spiritually: Being in nature fosters a spiritual connection, helping people feel part of something larger and more meaningful than themselves.</div>	<div>Deep connection to place</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">— Childhood connections and “nostalgia”: Nature evokes memories from childhood, providing a sense of comfort and familiarity, often tied to personal experiences and family traditions.— Helps ground people: a stabilising influence, helping individuals feel rooted and connected when they relocate to unfamiliar areas.</div>	<div>Connections with others</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">— People want to share nature with each other: Many individuals are motivated by the desire to experience nature alongside others, whether it's with friends, family (whānau), or their children.— With friends, whānau, and kids: Sharing nature fosters bonding and allows people to pass on their love for the environment.</div>

**These deep
connections create
a desire to not only
spend time in nature,
but to protect it.**



However, New Zealand's nature is in serious trouble

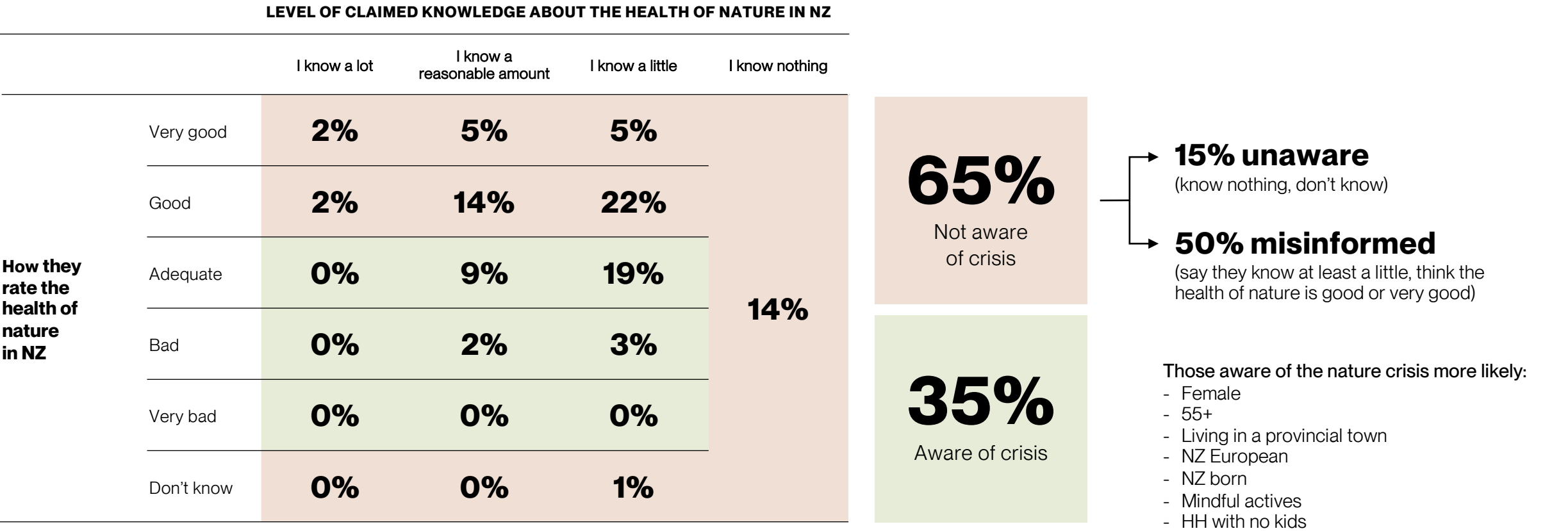


Habitat loss, over-exploitation, introduced invasive animals and plants, pollution and climate change are all having a devastating effect on New Zealand nature, with over 4000 species threatened or at risk of extinction.

**There is a nature crisis
– but people can't quite grasp it.**

Only a third of New Zealanders are aware of the crisis

Awareness of nature crisis



Even among those who are aware of the crisis, their understanding is often limited and sits in the background

With climate change, the recent weather events in New Zealand and overseas along with endangered species, some people know that things aren't looking as good for our natural environment as they once did.

But their depth of understanding is limited

- They know some species are at risk but not about the extent of the biodiversity crisis
- They don't always hear about it – it feels distant, not present
- There are many 'offramps' and reasons to be complacent – NZ is not so bad as others, we're already doing good things, aren't we?

Despite a lack of in-depth understanding, it is generally well understood that conservation efforts should always be better funded and supported – now more than ever.

“There's just not a lot of information out there, and I think that matters—if you want people to get involved, information is key.”

High action, mindful and close to home active

Despite low comprehension of the crisis, New Zealanders care about protecting nature

New Zealand’s waterways and native birds are specific causes more than half care about protecting.

98%

Care about protecting / restoring nature

AREAS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO PROTECT / RESTORE IN NZ

NZ nature in general	62%
NZ’s streams, rivers, and waterways	61%
NZ’s native birds	57%
NZ’s oceans and marine animals	56%
NZ’s native animals	54%
NZ’s native plants	52%
NZ’s landscapes	47%
Remove pest plants and animals that are not native in NZ (e.g. possums, stoats, rats, weeds)	45%
The habitat (the places animals live)	43%
The places I like to visit, walk, bike, run or relax	37%
Wildlife in my local area	35%
Other	1%
NET: CARE	98%
None of the above	2%

On average,

5.5

areas selected as important.

Those who see protection / restoration of nature as important across multiple areas (i.e., 5 or more) are more likely to be:

- Females
- 55+
- Living in a provincial town or rural areas
- NZ European
- NZ born
- Mindful actives

Implication

We need to make it clear to people that there is a job to be done

New Zealander's intention and care to protect and restore nature are on our side, but there is no urgency to act because people underestimate the state of the nature crisis.

Values are powerful for motivating people

We must not lose sight of people's values or diminish them – they can help us balance communicating the challenge at hand with optimism and hope.



Current actions for nature



2

Taking action for nature can look like a range of things

These actions can include activities such as donating to a nature project, advocating for nature by participating in a public consultation or talking about nature and conservation to others, volunteering by planting native trees or trapping, watching nature videos, or being out in nature such as going for a walk or having a BBQ on the beach.



Segmentation Survey.
BC_STAGE_BH. In the last 12 months, how often have you done each of the following?
Total base n=2316

In this report, we look at these actions through four lenses:

Connection with nature in New Zealand

Given **time** to help protect nature in New Zealand

Given **money** or donated to protect nature in New Zealand

Spoken up for or advocated for New Zealand's nature in person or online

The most prominent type of action is one that falls under the connection with nature category

This isn't the only action people are taking – around half have given their time, money, or voice to help protect nature over the last 12 months.

	Connected with nature in NZ	Given your time to help protect nature in NZ	Given money or donated to protect nature in NZ	Spoken up for or advocated for nature in person or online
	(e.g., had a BBQ on the beach, done a Great Walk, visited a wildlife sanctuary, watched a nature documentary)	(e.g., trapping, planting native trees, volunteered, picked up rubbish or joined a rubbish clean up)	(e.g., donated / contributed money to a nature project or adopted a native species e.g. kākāpō or penguin)	(e.g., participated in a public consultation, talked to others to protect nature in NZ, shared information about nature)
Taken action in the last 12 months	89%	55%	49%	46%
Weekly or more	20%	8%	3%	5%
Monthly	23%	10%	8%	9%
A few times a year	38%	22%	17%	19%
Just once	8%	15%	21%	12%
Never	11%	45%	51%	54%

Those currently most engaged with actions for nature tend to be younger and live in main cities

	Connected with nature in NZ	Given your time to help protect nature in NZ	Given money or donated to protect nature in NZ	Spoken up for or advocated for nature in person or online
	(e.g., had a BBQ on the beach, done a Great Walk, visited a wildlife sanctuary, watched a nature documentary)	(e.g., trapping, planting native trees, volunteered, picked up rubbish or joined a rubbish clean up)	(e.g., donated / contributed money to a nature project or adopted a native species e.g. kākāpō or penguin)	(e.g., participated in a public consultation, talked to others to protect nature in NZ, shared information about nature)
Taken action in the last 12 months (Total)	89%	55%	49%	46%
Demographic skews	More likely 18-34 / 35-54 Main city Māori / Pacific peoples / Asian HH with kids	More likely 18-34 Male Main city Māori NZ born HH with kids	More likely 18-34 Male Main city Māori / Pacific peoples	More likely 18-34 Male Main city Māori NZ born
Segment skews	More likely Enthusiastic actives Stimulation actives Mindful actives Social actives	More likely Enthusiastic actives Stimulation actives Social actives	More likely Enthusiastic actives Stimulation actives	More likely Enthusiastic actives Stimulation actives

Frequent actions largely reflect what's easy and accessible, often linked to everyday activities

Going for walks

Existing hobbies and exercise routines

Mini outings with friends and whānau, tamariki in particular

Implication

There's untapped potential. New Zealanders are open to acting for nature — especially when it feels easy and fits into their lives. But when it comes to giving time, money or voice, that first step can be hard. Our challenge is to help people cross that threshold.

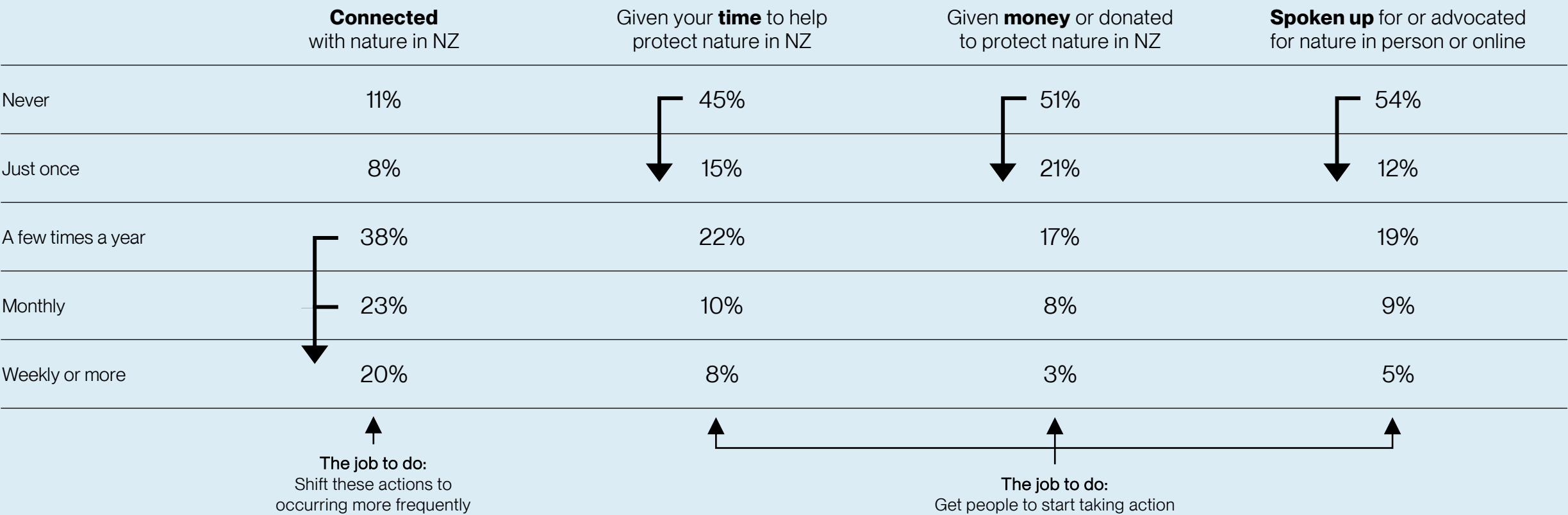
Connecting with nature is already part of people's routines. That's a win. Now we need to build on that momentum and encourage more of it — more often, and more deeply.

Awareness matters. It can open the door to a wider range of actions. But it's not the whole story and it's not enough to get people to act, especially when it comes to asking for people's time. The role of awareness is to give context and create relevance: We need to show people the 'why', to make the 'how' feel personal.



Implication

The job to do is different for different types of actions



Implication

Snowball connection into other actions

Connection is the easiest in – actions where we try to get people to get out in nature, integrating into their life and existing activities, passions, and behaviours.

Data shows us there is higher intent for connection actions in the future.



CONNECTION

Always be inspiring people to connect with nature

TIME

Depending on the commitment level, time in nature is more easily achievable and offers wider benefits

DONATION

Donations in isolation can feel transactional and disconnected. While you can get some quick wins, more impactful donations are better suited alongside connection and inspiration

ADVOCACY

People need to first feel inspired and informed in order to advocate

Diving into the barriers to action



3

We know that the size of the challenge is big, and to address it we need to mobilise at scale.

We've looked for the common threads across audiences to identify the opportunities and motivations that will have the greatest impact.



There are systemic barriers to overcome

We found these to be present across all action levels and for Māori and non-Māori

Time commitment

People are busy spending their time on other commitments and find it hard to break free to connect to nature

We found these to be present across all action levels and for Māori and non-Māori

Financial

Getting out into nature can feel costly – driving to locations, outings etc.

Donations can feel out of reach for many.

I don't have the extra money or funds: 1st barrier for Money action¹

Access

For city dwellers, getting out into nature (beyond just the local park) can feel difficult.

It's not easy to get to / accessible: 2nd barrier for Connection and top 4th for Time actions¹

Lack of awareness

You don't know what you don't know.

Many people aren't confident around what nature opportunities are happening near by.

Unaware and feel uninformed on what to advocate for.

Not sure of what initiatives are going on in my local area/ to support: 1st barrier for Time and 4th= for Money¹

I don't know enough / how: 3rd barrier for Money, 3rd for Time, 1st for Voice actions¹

"I think that's important if you're wanting people to actually get involved. Information is key. And I think that's the thing. I think when people don't know, they don't do." Understanding group, high action, mindful and close to home active

There are also social norms holding people back from taking action – few see it in their circles and are reluctant to act alone

This barrier is significantly higher among

- 18-34 year olds (connection, money, time, voice actions)
- Social actives (connection, time actions)

Segmentation Survey.
BARRIERS. Now, here are some reasons / situations why people may not [insert activity], which of the following have prevented you from starting to take this type of action / taking this action more frequently?
Total Voice n=579, Money n=579, Time n=578, Connection n=580

Barriers by action type

BARRIERS CONNECTION	
I'm focusing on doing other things instead	28%
It's not easy to get to / accessible	24%
I'm not physically able to / it's too physically tiring	23%
I don't want to be the only one doing it / doing it alone	19%
My friends / family / people around me don't do it	19%
Not sure of what initiatives are going on in my local area	18%
I don't know enough or where to find information	15%
It takes too much effort	14%
Nothing – I am already doing all I can	13%
I don't enjoy these activities	6%
BARRIERS TIME	
Not sure of what initiatives are going on in my local area	26%
I'm not physically able to / it's too physically tiring	24%
I don't know enough or where to find information	23%
It's not easy to get to / accessible	20%
My friends / family / people around me don't do it	18%
I'm focusing on other things I care about instead	17%
It takes too much effort	14%
I don't like groups of new people	14%
I don't want to be the only one doing it / doing it alone	13%
I didn't realise it was a problem	9%
I don't enjoy these activities	8%
I don't think it will make a difference	7%
It's not up to me	6%
Nothing – I am already doing all I can	6%

BARRIERS MONEY	
I don't have the extra money or funds	57%
I'm giving to other things I care about instead	18%
I don't know enough or where to find information	15%
It's not easy or clear how to donate or give money	13%
I don't know which initiative to support	13%
My friends / family / people around me don't do it	10%
It takes too much effort	9%
I didn't realise it was a problem	9%
It's not up to me	9%
I don't think it will make a difference	8%
Nothing – I am already doing all I can	6%

BARRIERS VOICE	
I don't know how / what to say	28%
I'm focusing on other things I care about instead	24%
I don't think it will make a difference	18%
It takes too much effort	15%
I don't want to be the only one doing it / doing it alone	14%
Nothing – I am already doing all I can	14%
My friends / family / people around me don't do it	13%
I feel embarrassed doing it	13%
I didn't realise it was a problem	10%
It's not up to me	10%

Overcoming the challenges



The number of levers available to encourage action is even greater for younger New Zealanders, those with kids, and Enthusiastic actives

Readers note: We have diagnosed the challenges and opportunities to taking action for nature through the **COM-B model for behaviour change**. The model boils behaviour (B) down to three components; capability (C), opportunity (O), and motivation (M). To modify behaviour we need to address at least one of these components. We describe it as the “know how, can do, want to” of behaviour change. For more information about this model click [here](#).

Action levers (capability, motivation, opportunity) by action type – average number of lever statements selected

Average	CONNECTION	MONEY	TIME	VOICE
Total sample	3.3	2.9	3.5	2.8
Among:				
18-34 years	3.6	3.2	4.3	3.3
35-54 years	3.4	3.2	3.7	2.8
55+ years	3.1	2.5	2.7	2.3
Those with kids living at home	3.6	3.1	4.0	2.9
Those without kids living at home	3.2	2.8	3.3	2.8
Main city	3.4	3.0	3.9	2.8
Provincial town	3.0	2.5	3.0	2.8
Rural area	3.7	3.4	3.0	2.6
NZ European or Pākehā	3.3	3.0	3.3	2.7
Māori	3.8	3.0	4.3	3.6
Asian	2.9	2.9	4.3	3.0
NZ born	3.4	2.9	3.5	2.8
Not NZ born	3.3	3.0	3.7	2.7
Enthusiastic actives	3.6	3.2	4.6	3.2
Stimulation actives	3.8	2.7	3.6	3.5
Mindful actives	3.4	3.5	3.3	2.9
Social actives	3.8	2.8	4.2	2.9

A focused look at the levers that can be used to overcome barriers to action, regardless of the type of action



TAP INTO MOTIVATION

Motivation in COM-B

There are tactical motivational levers that we can use to tap into people’s inherent desire to connect to nature

<p>Motivation</p> <p>Experiential</p> <p>Physically being in nature, experiencing the awe and majesty, experiencing something new.</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Social</p> <p>Opportunities to be naturing together – family time, friend time, colleague time.</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Tamariki</p> <p>Nature and children go hand in hand. Burning off energy, whanau time, learning and development and instilling values in the next gen.</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Joy and fun</p> <p>Make it fun. People are more likely to share and take part if it's joyful.</p>
<p>Motivation</p> <p>Positive feedback and runs on the board</p> <p>People can turn a blind eye to doom and gloom. Show the positive momentum, how they can ‘get on the bandwagon’ and how their actions are contributing.</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Restorative</p> <p>A chance to be calm, peaceful and healed.</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>People love to learn new and interesting aspects of nature.</p>	<p>Motivation</p> <p>Local and specific</p> <p>People can get behind NZ and DOC in general but local and specific tugs on the heartstrings more.</p>

TAP INTO MOTIVATION

Motivation in COM-B

This social opportunity is heightened among families

Motivations/ Opportunities – SOCIAL SIG. DIFFERENCES	Family with kids	No kid HH
Money		
If my friends / family / others were doing it too	26% ▲	17% ▼
Time		
If it was available through my workplace / community centre or group / school	24% ▲	16% ▼
If my friends / family / others were doing it too / with me	43% ▲	29% ▼
Connection		
If my friends / family / others were doing it too / with me	48% ▲	38% ▼

"I have two primary school-age girls and just getting out with them and sort of sharing it with them... being present with them... It takes a bit of motivating and rewarding to get my kids out... but pretty much 99% of the time once I get them going, they actually really enjoy it."

Understanding, mid action, social and enthusiastic active

"Nature allows me to connect more with my daughter. I noticed that with no devices, no Wi-Fi, I seem to get more out of her than what I would being say in town doing like going shopping and whatnot. Yeah, we go for a lot of hikes, trail walks, flower picking, making flower arts, flower bracelets, that type of thing."

Testing group, high action, enthusiastic active

SHOW PEOPLE HOW THEY CAN ACT

Opportunity in COM-B

Present opportunities for people to say ‘yes’ to getting involved in nature

<p>Opportunity</p> <p>Show what’s out there</p> <p>People don’t know what they don’t know. Show them hidden gems and new ways to connect with nature.</p>	<p>Opportunity (social opportunity)</p> <p>Invited by others</p> <p>Nature is something to be enjoyed with others. Consider opportunities for people to invite others and use nature as shared, social occasions.</p>	<p>Opportunity</p> <p>Amplify local initiatives</p> <p>There’s a lot already happening that people are not aware of. DOC can help amplify, and people love what’s local.</p>
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MAKE IT EASY TO ACT AND CONTINUE TO ACT**Capability** in COM-B

Lower the barrier to entry and make it easy for people to take part

Capability (ease)

Piggybacking

Piggyback off existing behaviours to make it easy for people to take action and donate.

Capability (ease)

City connections

It can be hard for city folk to get out into nature, show up in their world.

Capability (ease)

Demonstrate impact

Make it easy for people to see the impact of their contributions to reinforce future behaviours.

MAKE IT EASY TO ACT AND CONTINUE TO ACT

Capability in COM-B

Making the action easy by integrating into people’s existing behaviours and hobbies is particularly important for mobilising younger New Zealanders

Motivations / Opportunities	18 – 34 year olds	35-54 year olds	55+ year olds
Connection			
If I built it into my routine	32%	27%	20%
If it was available through my workplace / community centre or group / school	25% ▲	19%	9% ▼
Money			
If I built it into my routine	23% ▲	20%	10% ▼
If I could do it at times when I'm already spending money	17%	20% ▲	11% ▼
Time			
If I built it into my routine	25% ▲	17%	10% ▼
If I could do it with other activities I like	23% ▲	20%	9% ▼

There are some watch outs

What to avoid when designing communications and initiatives

 <p>Too transactional</p> <p>Only donations with no connection feels too transactional and heads into ‘user pays’ territory.</p>	 <p>Too ‘gimmicky’ and goes against the connection</p> <p>This goes against the grain of people’s deep connections.</p>	 <p>Makes it harder to get going</p> <p>People struggle to get out enough as it is. Anything that makes it harder is a strong concern e.g. paying for each step can feel like a barrier to walking.</p>	 <p>Too grim</p> <p>If it feels too dire and overwhelming, people look the other way – we need to balance the tension with hope.</p>
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We don’t want to diminish the strong, authentic values.

We can spark joy and have novel ideas but people’s values are central.

We see this coming through in people’s responses to the different concepts and why some had better responses than others.

And for Māori in particular

What to avoid – noting that all the 'watchouts' above relate just as much to Māori



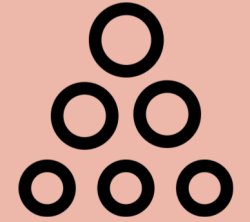
Too generic

One size does not fit all



Too patronising

Aspects about concepts need to be 'with' Māori, not tightly constrained by other drivers



Too hierarchical

Not volunteering – 'joining'

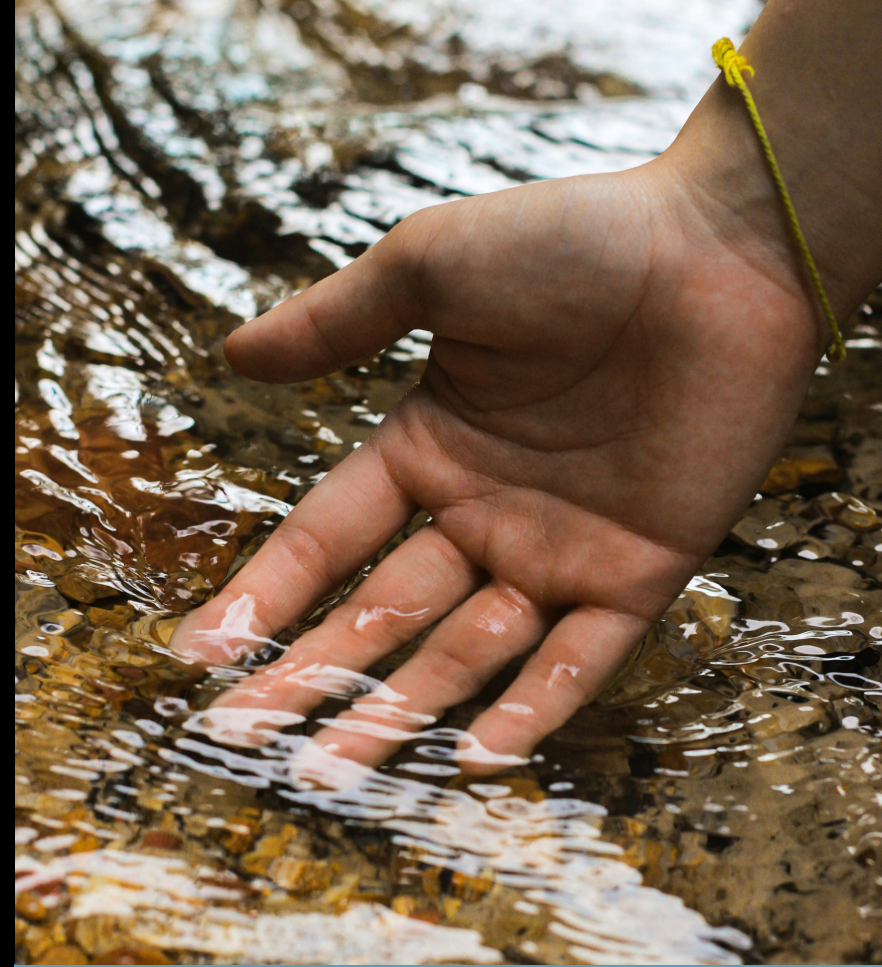
Implication

Initiatives should be informed by different motivations to ensure relevance with a broad variety of New Zealanders.

Opportunities and capabilities are more universal; showing how easy it is to engage with nature and highlighting accessible actions that are achievable and provide a sense of momentum in making a difference.



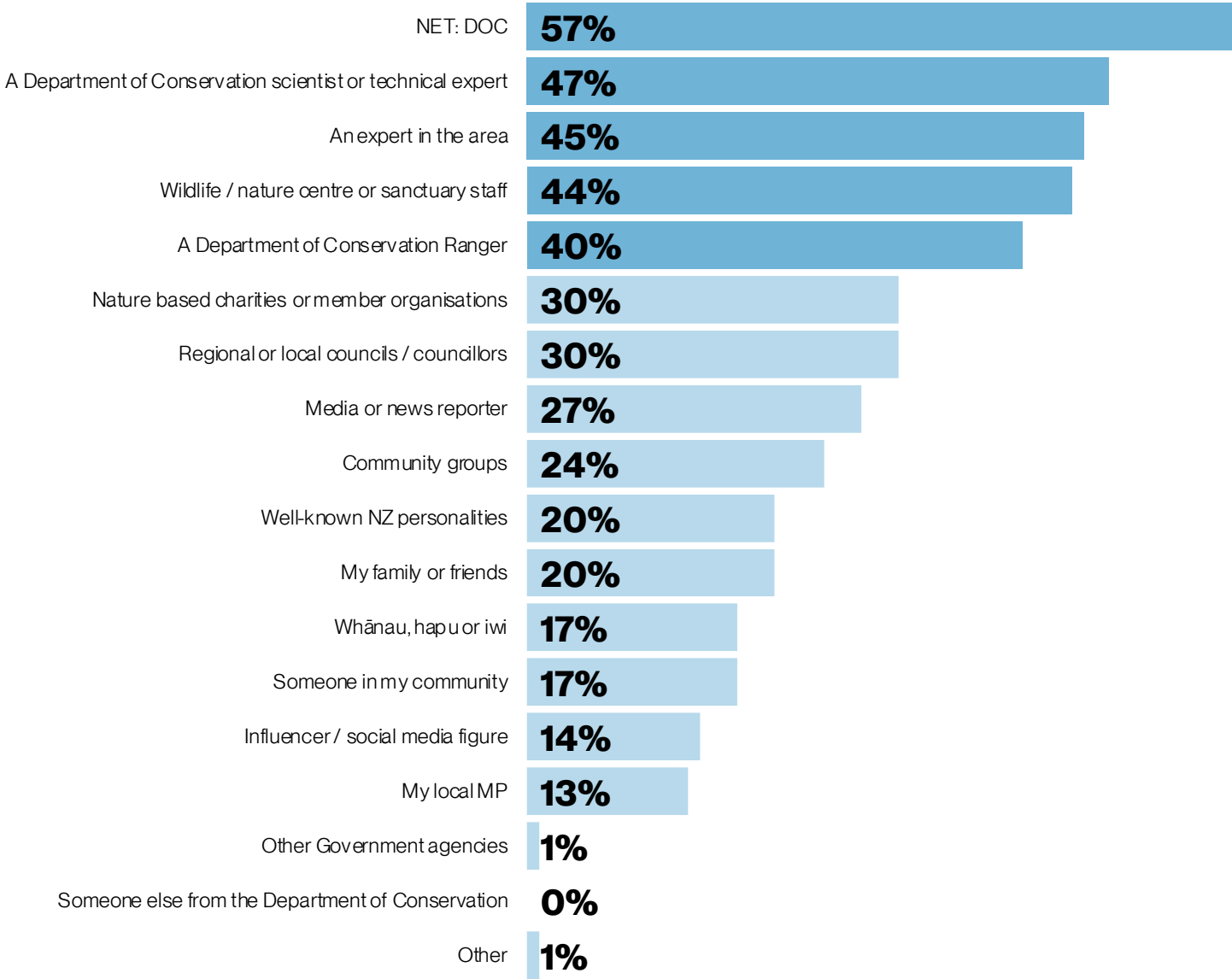
Effectively engaging New Zealanders



5

New Zealanders want the messenger of information about protecting and restoring NZ’s nature to be someone who is knowledgeable and legitimate. DOC has permission to be the messenger.

Segmentation Survey.
INFO_ WHO. And who would you like the provider of this information (about New Zealand’s conservation efforts to help protect/ restore nature) to be?
Base had a preferred channel n=2170



DOC is well placed to grow people's connection to nature

DOC is well suited to growing people's connection to nature – it is the right fit organisation to do so.

For Māori, however –the deeper understanding of kaitiakitanga is inherent and occurs naturally. DOC would be best suited by acknowledging that first and then 'partnering' particularly to allay the negative connotation of 'volunteering' or 'donating' and not to be mistaken as the same as 'koha' which is a reciprocal gift.

To maximise this, DOC needs to lead with people's deep-seated values and connection

- Lead with people's inherent connection to nature, this feels authentic
- If we jump straight to donations or advocacy, we've missed the whole reason why people should care
- Balance the biodiversity crisis with hope and optimism

While trusted, DOC can feel “behind the scenes”, especially for city dwellers

- Continue to grow visibility
- And amplify local and regional initiatives
- Conservation is a large table with many seats – DOC can connect the dots and grow momentum

Qual

We tested a series of initiatives with New Zealanders and found...

Initiatives that work well tap into the motivating values – values-led, social, easy, and explorative

Experiential	Social	Tamariki	Joy and fun
Positive feedback and runs on the board	Restorative	Learning	Local and specific

There are also initiatives that do not form a deep connection to nature but they are very easy to fit into busy lives

<p>Capability (ease)</p> <p>Piggybacking</p> <p>Piggyback off existing behaviours to make it easy for people to take action and donate.</p>	<p>Capability (ease)</p> <p>City connections</p> <p>It can be hard for city folk to get out into nature, show up in their world.</p>	<p>Capability (ease)</p> <p>Demonstrate impact</p> <p>Make it easy for people to see the impact of their contributions to reinforce future behaviours.</p>
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Initiatives that add barriers to acting or are not connected to the core values enough don't land as well

4 key takeaways



6

1.

People want DOC to be doing this kind of work

New Zealanders strongly support DOC's role in conservation and expect the organisation to lead efforts in protecting nature.

2.

Individuals don't want to feel like they are getting passed the load

While people are willing to act, they want to feel that the responsibility is shared, not placed solely on them.

3.

It needs to be reciprocal and it needs to be fresh

The relationship between DOC and the public should be collaborative, with a sense of mutual responsibility. Creative campaigns and initiatives must also feel new and engaging to keep the public invested.

4.

Initiatives that work well tap into deep values and motivations, are easy, and show people what to do

Successful initiatives clearly highlight the personal and collective benefits of taking action, provide simple, actionable steps, and connect people to nature in ways that align with their core values.

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