

Giving back to nature

Insights from Queen Charlotte Track

Department of Conservation Heritage and Visitors Unit

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1. Purpose of these insights

This document provides an insights snapshot of research into the walking experience of visitors on Queen Charlotte Track (QCT). It focuses on three key areas: *why visitors walk the track, how they connect with nature, and what 'giving back' to conservation means.*

The impetus for distilling these insights came from earlier work by the Heritage and Visitors Unit on the future of tourism and values-based tourism. That work developed a view on the shift that's required to develop a tourism system that delivers more than just economic growth – that delivers across all four capitals outlined in the Treasury Living Standards Framework: natural, human, social and financial/physical. Essentially this would support tourism 'giving back' more than it takes.

Context for research

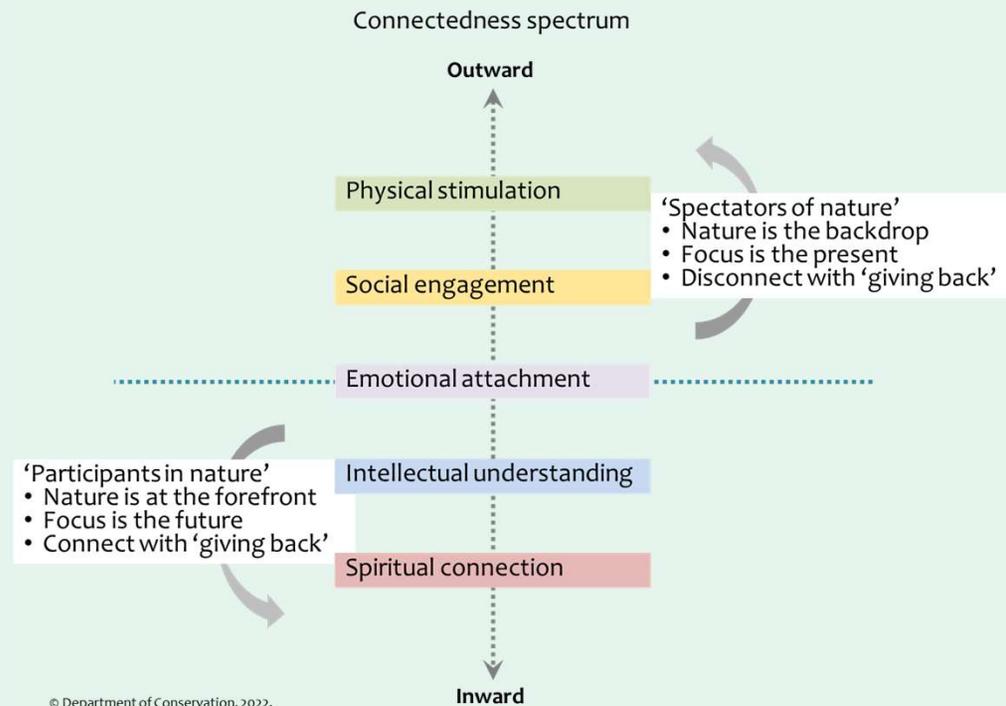
As mentioned, the insights distilled here focus on gaining a deeper understanding of *why visitors walk the track, how they connect with nature, and what 'giving back' to conservation means* to them. It is not a summary of the more detailed research report.



- Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 23 visitors over the 2020–21 summer by an independent contractor.
 - Visitors came from a range of ages and life stages across the North and South Islands. There was a mix of walking group sizes: solo, pairs, and groups with and without children.
 - Some walked the entire track, some walked part of the track with an overnighter and others undertook a day hike. Most had previous walking/tramping experience.
- QCT crosses private and public land. It's managed in partnership with the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai, Marlborough District Council and private landowners.
 - The entire 70 km track can be walked in 3–5 days or in shorter overnight and day walks. It can be accessed by water taxi and walkers can have gear transferred by boat to overnight locations.
 - The track forms the northern-most South Island section of the Te Araroa Trail, and is a Great Ride on the Nga Haerenga New Zealand Cycle Trail.

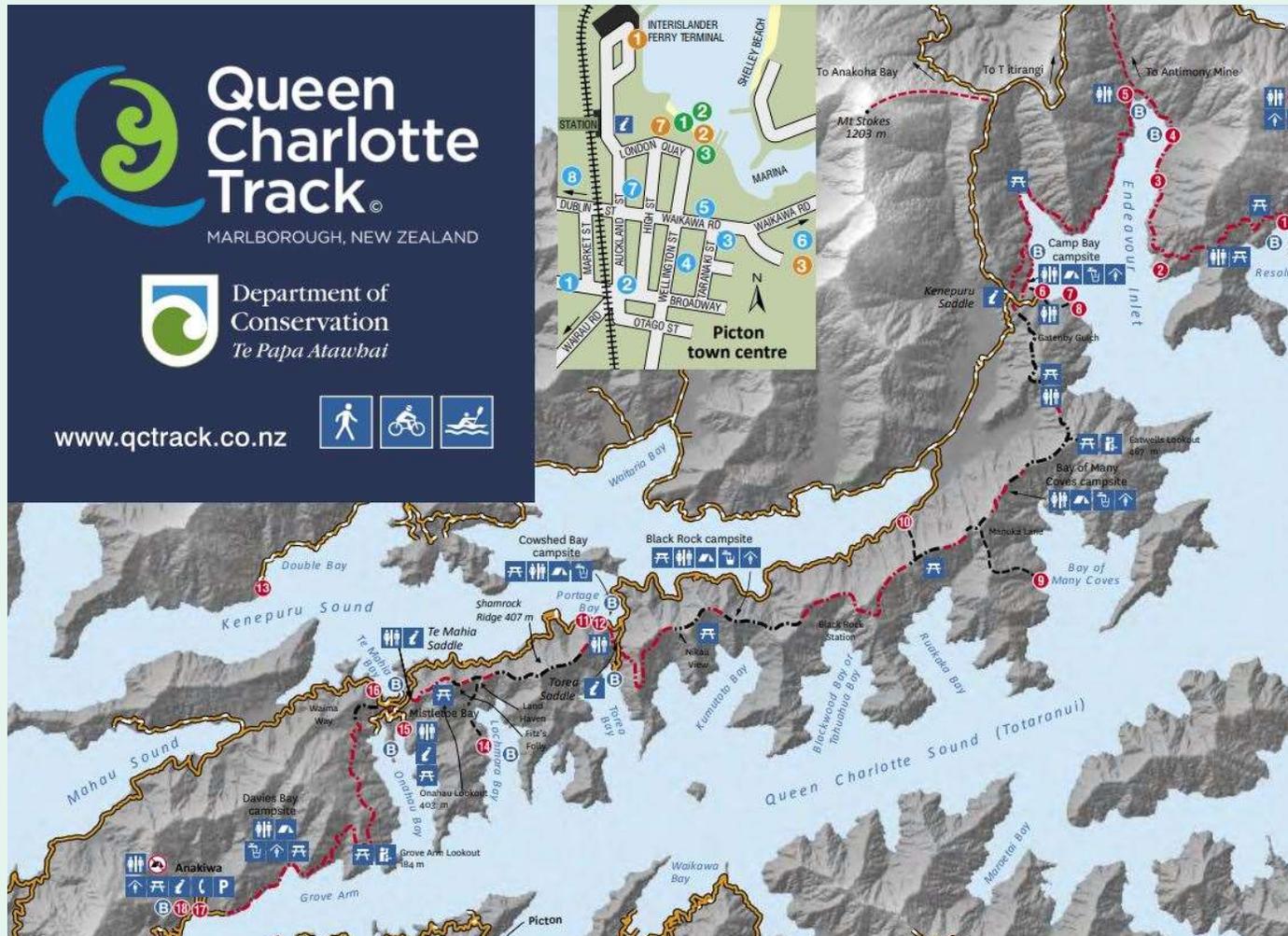
Key points

- Visitors connect differently with nature when walking QCT. Five dimensions are distinguished in the diagram here. Those who are Outward-orientated tend to be 'spectators of nature'. Those who are Inward-orientated tend to be 'participants in nature'.
 - 'Spectators of nature' tend to see nature as secondary (a backdrop) to their activity. They are less connected to 'giving back'. 'Participants in nature' tend to see nature as primary (at the forefront) of their activity. They are more connected to 'giving back'.
- ↓
- There is an opportunity for DOC to encourage visitors who walk QCT to support 'giving back' at place (locally). It would mean communicating differently for 'spectators of nature' versus 'participants in nature'. Any communication should be multi-layered and engaging.
 - DOC has developed an 'engagement spectrum' to guide people from awareness to connection to action. This could be adopted more extensively to encourage visitors 'giving back' to nature.



2. Background on QCT

Location of QCT



QCT offers a unique experience

- Accessible: Well-developed tracks, easy to get to, walking options, varied ages and fitness levels.
- Scenic: Captures New Zealand's land and seascapes with spectacular views of the Sounds.
- Comfort: Option of campgrounds, lodges and cabins; packs/bags and gear can be transferred.
- Varied activities: Walking track and biking trail; can kayak, boat, birdwatch or cruise in the area.
- Historic: Māori and European settlement as well as Meritoto/Ship Cove history.
- Built-up: Part of track near residential area, presence of boats and cafes – almost suburban.
- Combo walks: Often combined with Abel Tasman or other walks in Sounds and Nelson Lakes.



- Offers the benefit of entry-level and overnight tramping experience to urban dwellers.
- Has potential to support more New Zealanders to appreciate and be active in nature.

Encourages more people into nature

A modified setting like QCT makes walks more accessible:

“I loved the viewpoints – A lot of views along the way, and obviously the track is beautifully maintained and it’s cool... it’s different to the other tracks in the South Island because it is more civilised, and people of all tramping abilities are able to do it.”

“It was super easy to navigate, it wasn’t too hard or too long or anything, it helped that the scenery is beautiful – I loved that everyone along the way was so friendly – I guess you meet a lot of like-minded people on the overnight hikes, so that was good too.”



Yet QCT is too ‘domesticated’ for those seeking wilderness:

“Everyone was out mowing their lawns at their bach while you were doing a hike and [there was] a lot of signage for private accommodation and some of it is a bit excessive that kept bringing you out [of the track experience].”

Contrasting vistas

Most visitors commented on the contrasting vistas of QCT – being in nature versus being in built-up areas.



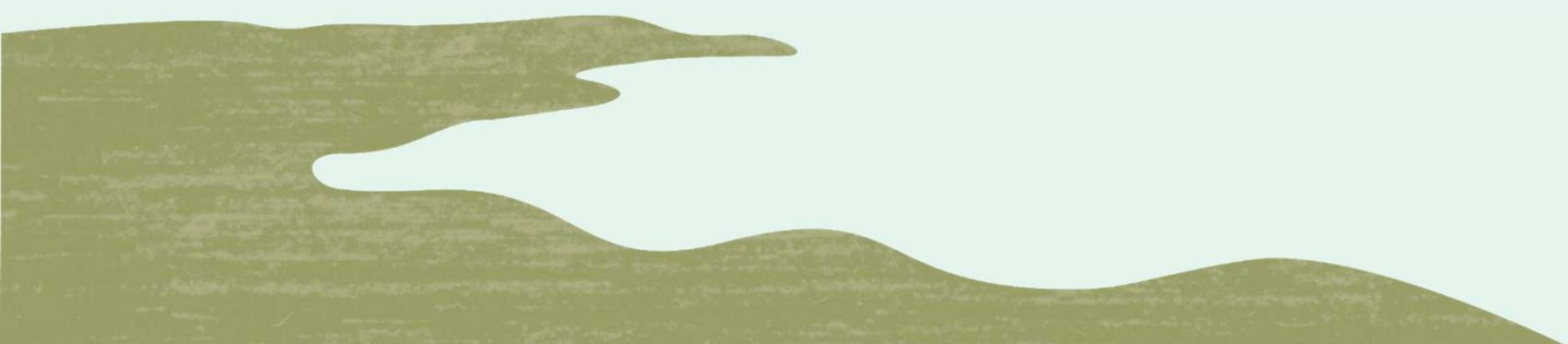
Photo: Logan Penniket - QCT



Photo: Malcolm Anderson - QCT

3. QCT visitor experiences

Deeper analysis of the research interview transcripts provided a richer perspective into QCT visitor experiences and connection with nature.



Connectedness with nature

“Connection with nature can be defined as an experiential oneness with the natural world (Mayer & Frantz, 2004), that develops through experiences with nature.” ¹

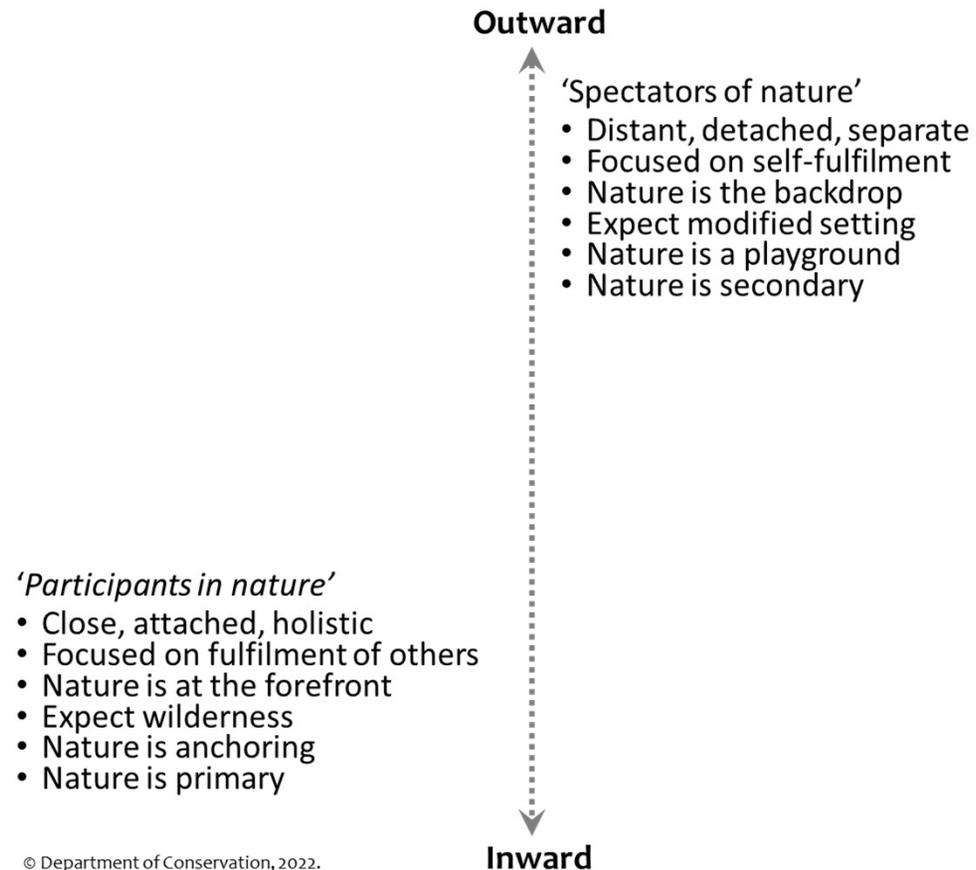
Connectedness to nature differs

Primary driver shows that visitors connect differently.

The descriptions are the extreme ends of the vertical axis. It outlines the different ways visitors connect with nature on QCT.

- Outward-orientated visitors have a distant connection – tend to be ‘spectators of nature’.
- Inward-orientated visitors have a close connection – tend to be ‘participants in nature’.

Connectedness spectrum

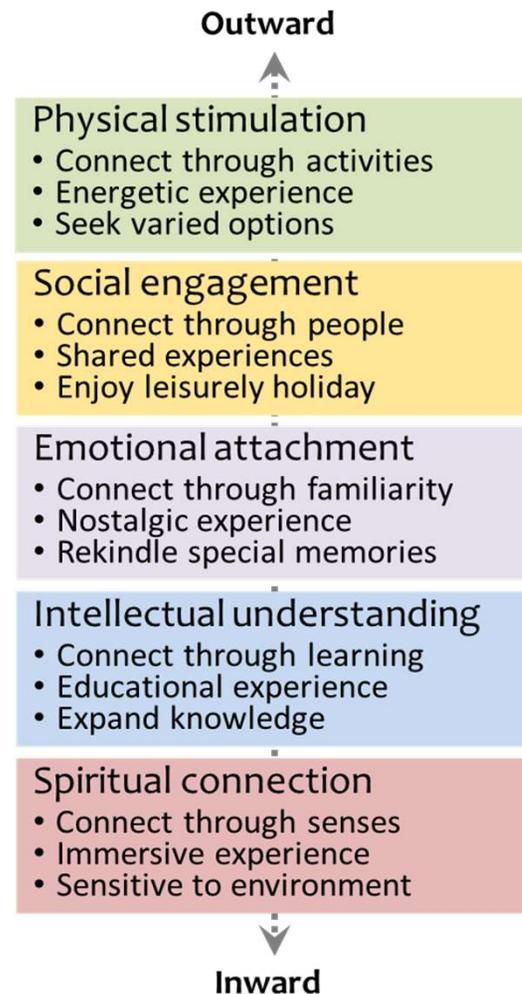


Outward versus Inward is the key driver underpinning people’s connection with nature. The axis is a continuum and people may shift along the axis in different situations and social groups. At the Outward end people focus on their external / social world. At the Inward end people focus on their internal / personal world.

Visitors connect differently

Applying analysis of 5 human dimensions: physical, social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual, helps us delve more deeply into how visitors connect with nature differently and seek different experiences from the QCT.

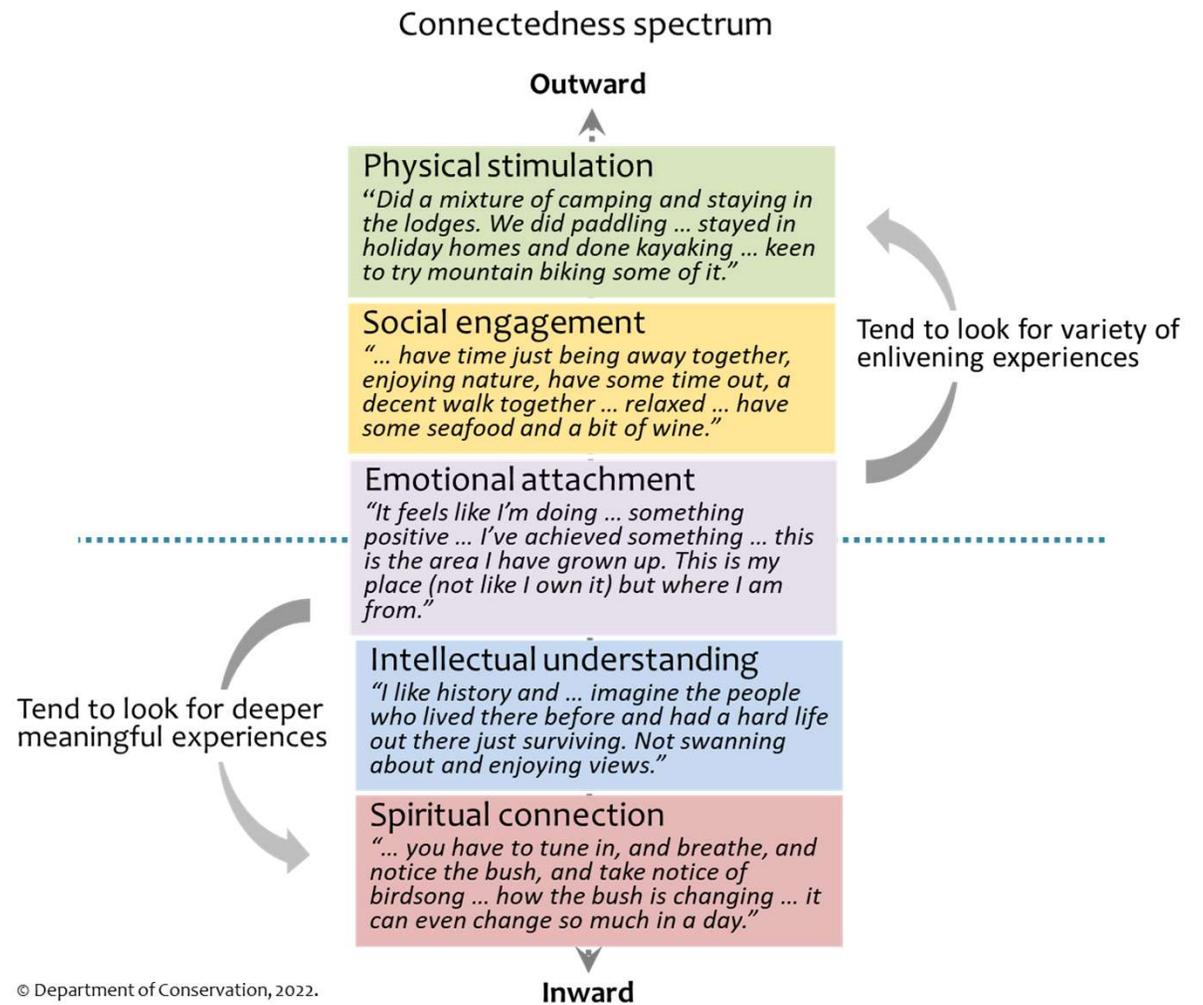
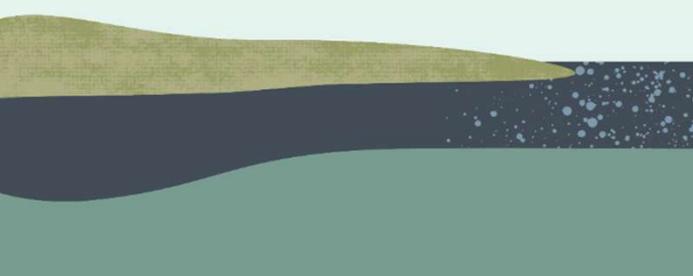
Connectedness spectrum



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Differences apparent in what people say

- Those seeking physical stimulation, social engagement and emotional attachment enjoy the varied experiences QCT offers.
- Those seeking intellectual understanding are keen on history, culture and birdlife. Those seeking spiritual connection are into nature itself.
- It is possible for some people to fit into more than one dimension.



This research doesn't tell us how many visitors sit in each dimension of the connectedness spectrum. However the data indicates QCT is more likely to attract those seeking Outward-orientated experiences.

4. 'Giving back'

'Giving back' is visitors leaving the place in a better state than when they arrived.²

Willingness to take action

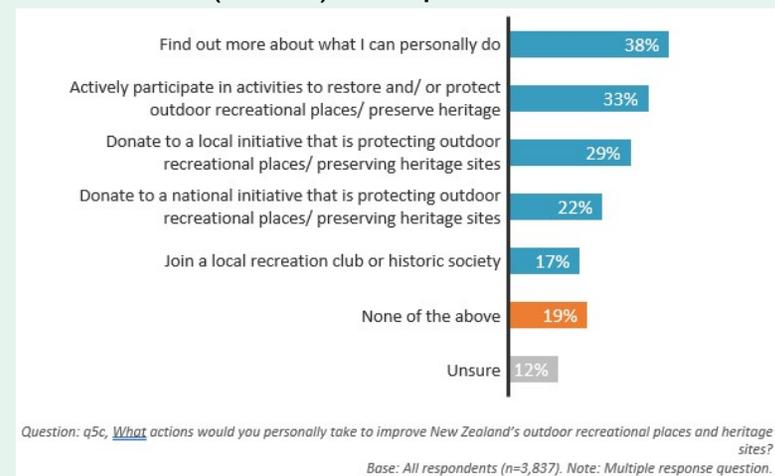
DOC undertook Customer Segmentation research (2018–2020) to better understand New Zealanders’ needs, motivations, attitudes and behaviours to the outdoors. It included perceptions of the environment, conservation and biodiversity, and explored what actions people might personally take to improve the outdoors.³



The quantitative results for all survey respondents (below) showed a majority (84%) indicated that access to the New Zealand outdoors was a major advantage of living here. However, only half (49%) were proud of the current state of the NZ outdoors.



Over half (56%) of those surveyed agreed action that they take can have a positive impact on the outdoors. Very few said they would not do one of the actions (below) to improve the outdoors.



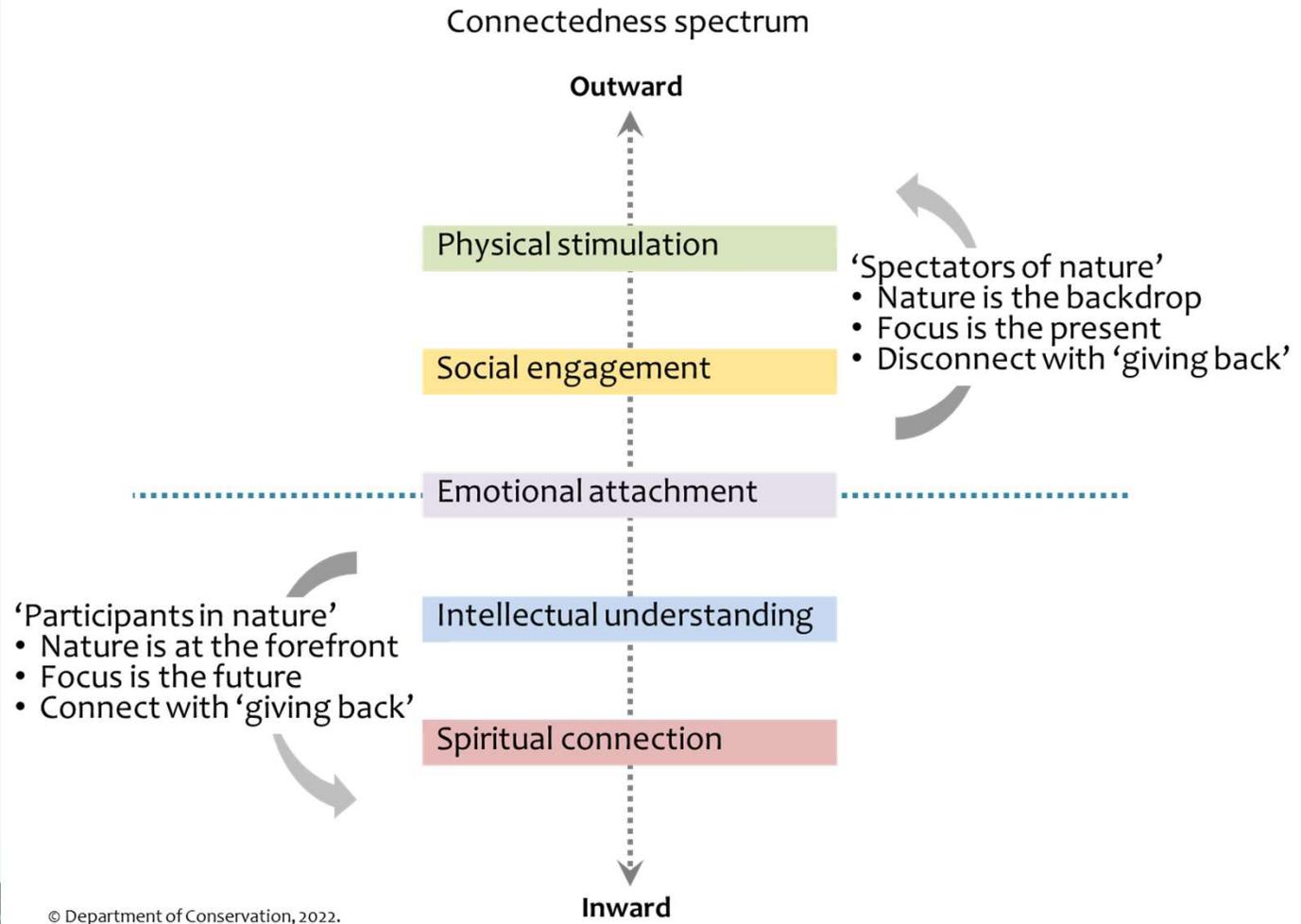
How 'giving back' is interpreted

- QCT research participants understood the phrase 'giving back'. At times, interviewer prompting included: 'contributing', 'nature benefits', 'make a positive difference' and 'improve places'.
- While there was a varied list of 'giving back' ideas, at times probing was necessary for research participants to be more specific.

Areas of interest	'Giving back' actions
<i>Donations or fees</i>	Send \$ donation – online mechanism when on QCT (donation used at place or nationwide)
	Higher fee for track use and campsite
<i>Conservation activities</i>	Tree planting* or donate a tree
	Remove wilding pines and other weeds
	Pest reporting: check traps, record sightings, adopt a trap, set up traps
	Record bird sightings or birdsong
	Activities at home base (eg, nest box monitoring)
	Plot locations of plants or species
<i>Maintenance</i>	Track or facility maintenance and repair
<i>Sharing QCT experience</i>	Telling others about QCT experience
	Local DOC ranger experience
	Survey of QCT experience
	NB: A few were unsure how to 'give back'. * Around one-third have done tree planting voluntarily.

How 'giving back' differs

- Visitors seeking physical stimulation and social engagement struggle to see how they might 'give back' in a simple way. Money via fees or donations is easier. Nature is their playground and their connection with place is weak.
- Those visitors seeking emotional attachment, intellectual understanding and spiritual connection tend to be more open to 'giving back'. It is all about connecting to places.



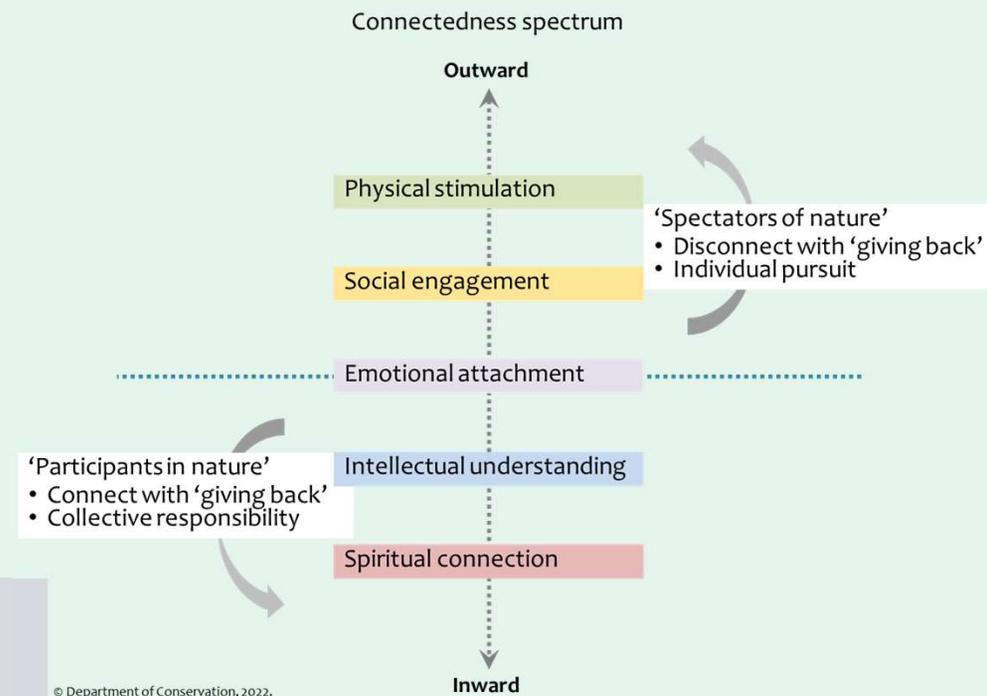
The key to engaging QCT visitors across the connectedness spectrum is to ensure 'giving back' activities are aligned with their interests. Outward-orientated visitors' activities are likely to differ from Inward-orientated visitors' activities.

Environmental issues are invisible

- Despite New Zealanders being open to taking action to improve the NZ outdoors (slide 17), the QCT research reveals few are actively taking action. There is no mechanism or opportunity in place to encourage people into taking action (see slide 22 for more on this).
- Environmental issues on QCT are mostly invisible to 'spectators of nature'. Their 'holiday experience' is what counts most – it's largely an individual pursuit. Whereas 'participants in nature' tend to notice the presence of pests, wilding pines, etc. They are more tuned into their 'nature experience' and express a greater sense of collective responsibility.



- Behaviour change studies show while knowledge and awareness is important; on its own it's not enough to prompt people into taking action.⁴
- There is an opportunity to encourage 'spectators of nature' to widen their mindset through adopting new behaviours.

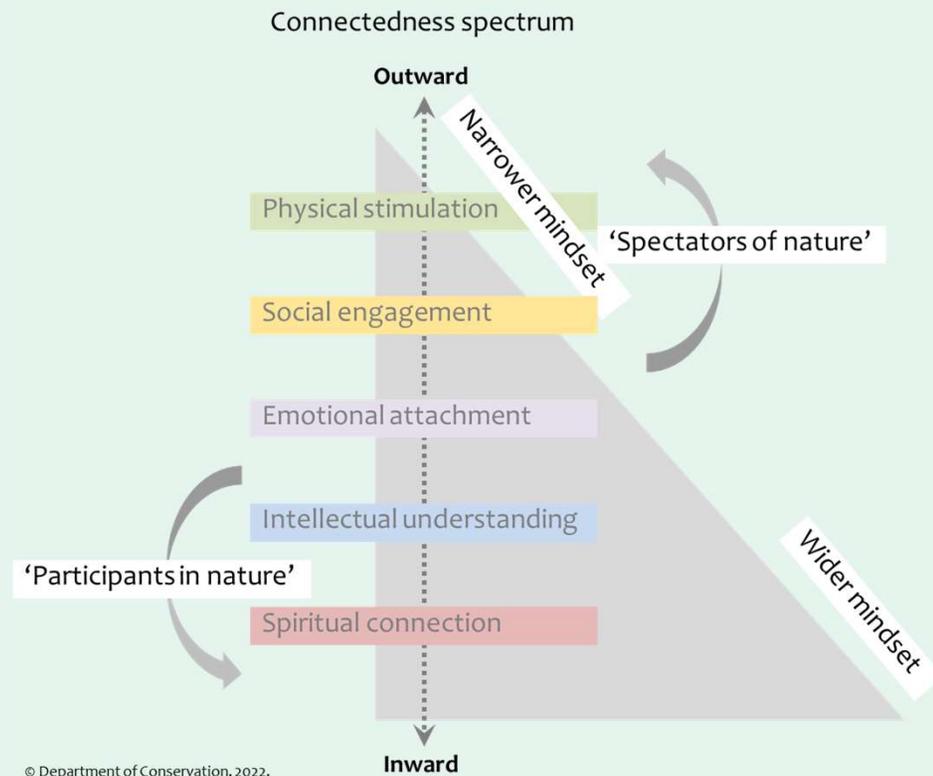


Widening mindsets

- DOC could proactively support ‘spectators of nature’ to widen their mindset and adopt new ‘giving back’ behaviours on QCT (see diagram on right). A meta-analysis study (Green et al. 2019) shows social marketing campaigns can lead to positive shifts in attitudes and behaviour to address biodiversity conservation problems.⁵
- The study outlines a theory of change that explains the drivers of behaviour change. Three elements are key:
 - Community engagement and social interaction
 - Multiple points of intervention
 - Changes in knowledge and interpersonal communication (especially peer-to-peer).



This means any strategy and intervention to support visitors to ‘give back’ needs to be multi-layered with interpersonal communication as a key driver to adopt new behaviours.



Facilitating change

DOC has a role in facilitating change:

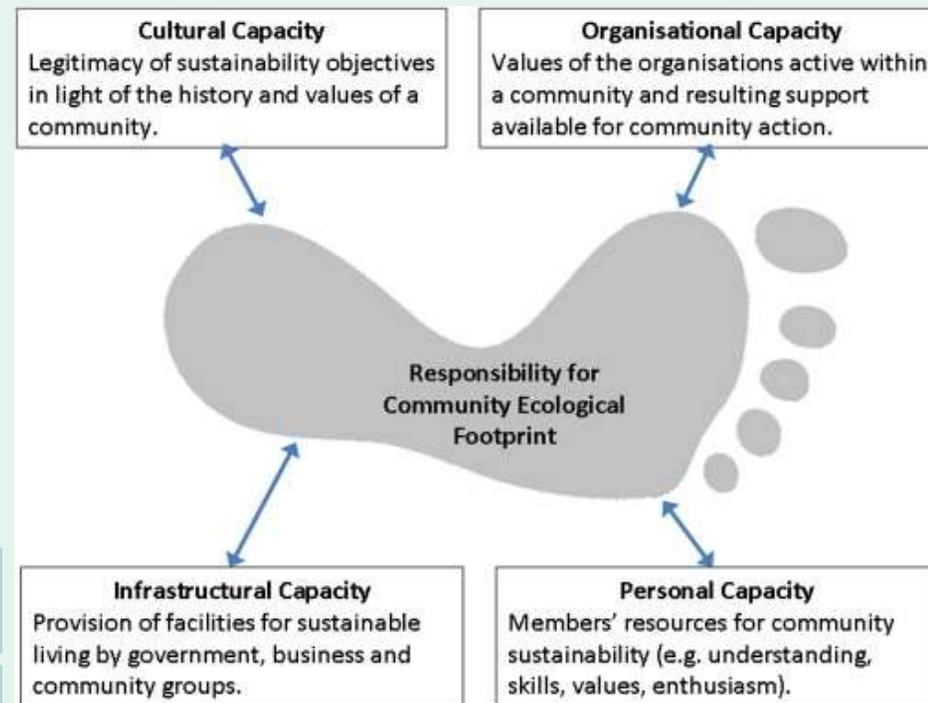
- Academic research into sustainable consumption (Middlemiss, 2010) suggests the capacity for an individual to take sustainable action *depends on the structures that surround them* (see diagram on the right).⁶
- In the context of ‘giving back’ if “empowering structures are not available...the responsibility of the individual is diminished ...”⁵ This suggests insufficient mechanisms exist for visitors to ‘give back’ to nature in the places they visit. Visitors are not adequately equipped to engage in activities for change.



“I can think of tree planting, but I don’t know how they could do that or where they would plant trees.”

“I don’t mind making a donation, but I don’t have money in my wallet anymore these days – I think there was a donation box ...”

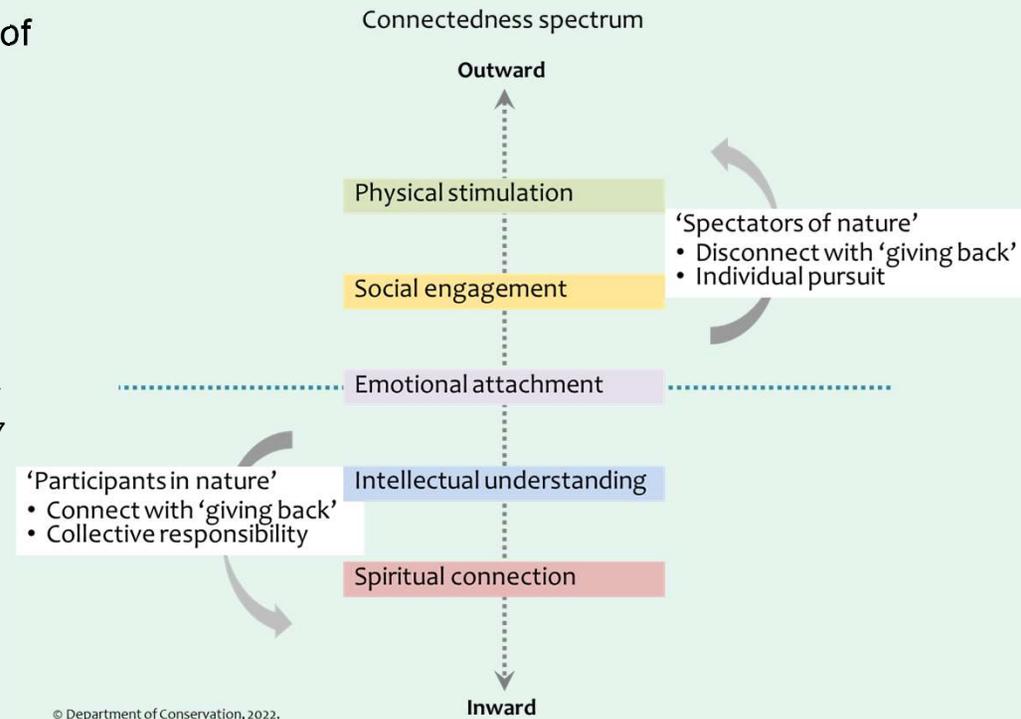
Responsibility for ecological footprint



Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption: Lessons from Environmental Justice and Ecological Citizenship. Lucy Middlemiss, 2010.

Applying a te ao Māori lens

- From both Māori and indigenous world views, relationships with the natural environment are central to wellbeing. When the biophysical and spiritual elements of an ecosystem are functioning well and nurturing and supporting life, The mauri of that ecosystem is strengthened.
- QCT offers an opportunity to educate and encourage visitors to play their part in protecting and restoring the mauri of its environment through 'giving back'. "This is not about simply treating the natural environment better so we can continue to exploit it." (Matunga, et al 2020) ⁷
- Encouraging visitors to adopt 'giving back' behaviours would support them to value the places and the host communities they visit. For QCT it would encourage the kind of tourism that values mutual learning, genuine interest and meaningful exchange – tourism that is also regenerative.



5. Engaging visitors

Harnessing visitors' enthusiasm

There is opportunity for DOC to encourage visitors to play their part in protecting and restoring the mauri of the environment through activities that 'give back' to nature and host communities – especially in their own region. The benefit to visitors is a meaningful and memorable experience. The benefit to host communities is sowing the seeds for regenerative tourism.



- As mentioned, there are contrasting views on 'giving back'. More specifically, 'spectators of nature' tend to opt for financial contributions: donations or higher fees. Whereas 'participants in nature' tend to opt for activity-based 'giving back' actions at place or in their region: planting natives, pest trapping, removing wilding pines and weeds, etc.
- Visitors who live in or have a strong connection with the region are the most willing to engage in activity-based 'giving back' actions on QCT. As one research participant says: *"It could be anywhere I suppose, but I also feel ... more attached to a place that I know ... and so that makes a difference ... you feel like you have more of a connection to it."*

Some are already on the journey

“...if you did something...like adopting a trap kind of thing and then you know that your money is going towards something, that it is helping – or to volunteer – like I’ve seen signs everywhere to volunteer with trapping or with trail maintenance, or putting in the wasp things, or help planting trees in order to help one species of animals ... that is a way to give back.” [Research participant]

Adopting new behaviours is complex

A literature review (Harbrow, 2019) of research to understand the relationship between participation in outdoor recreation and support for conservation and the environment found that visitors' support for conservation is not a certainty – it relies on regular and repeated participation.⁸



Direct and indirect associations between outdoors participation and pro-environmental behaviours were identified and are summarised below:

- Direct associations in nature: personal contact, time spent or enjoyable experiences.
- Indirect associations in nature: attachment to place, involvement in specialised recreation activity, or building an emotional connection through spending time in the outdoors.



Harbrow suggests the following ways to engage visitors to contribute (give back) to conservation:

- encourage regular and repeat visits as well as attracting new visitors to the outdoors
- focus on specific locations (appeal to self-interest of specialist recreation, eg: fishing, tramping)
- tapping into visitors' emotional attachment to place (where there is frequent repeat use).

Encouraging ‘giving back’

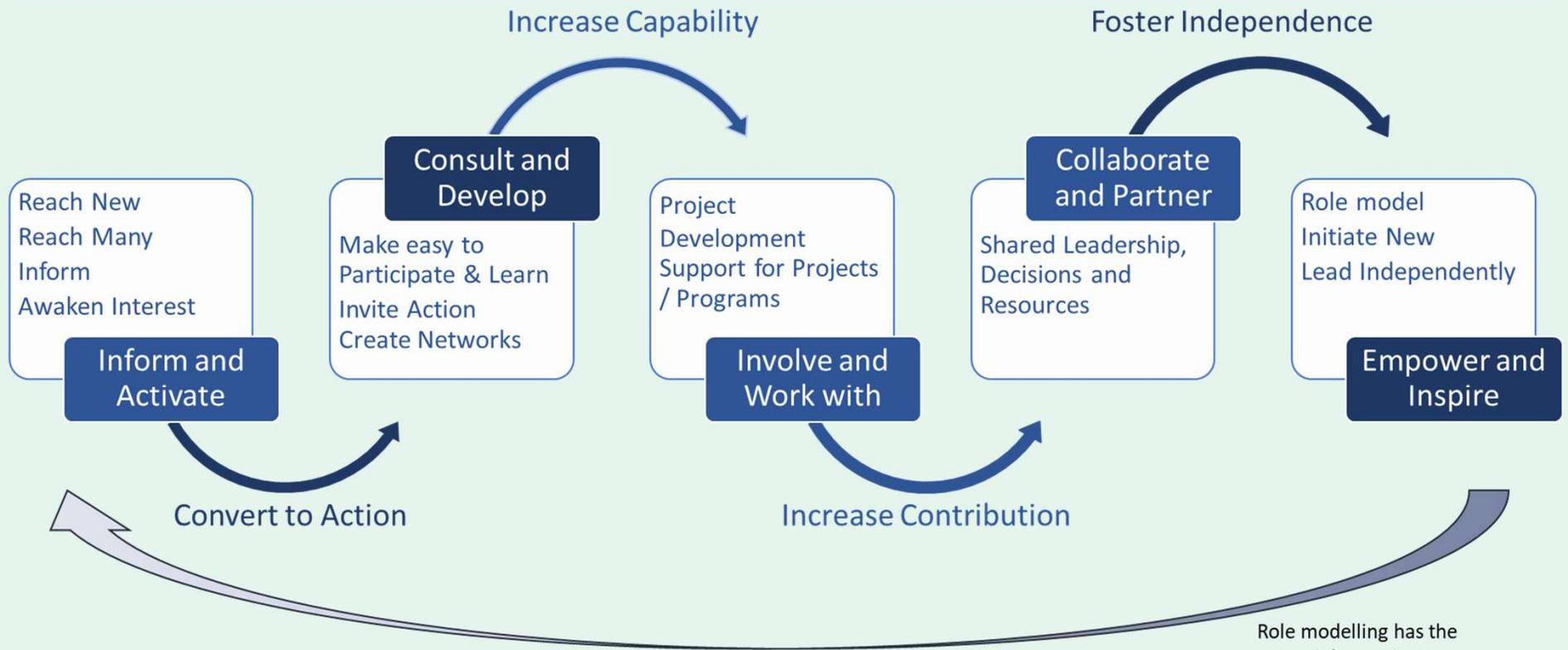
Delivering a meaningful and memorable visitor experience is key and has the potential to nudge visitors into taking action and caring more deeply about the places they visit. It would also support delivering across the four capitals of the Treasury Living Standards Framework: natural, human, social and financial/physical.



- DOC is working on an ‘Engagement and Participation Spectrum’ framework (diagrams on next slides) to inspire and connect New Zealanders to take action for conservation. It shows a continuum for stages of engagement that supports people to move from awareness to connection to action.
- DOC’s role in this spectrum is to enable, collaborate and partner with others. At the regional and local level the spectrum could be used to plan each stage of engagement, including who to work with.

Engagement and Participation Spectrum

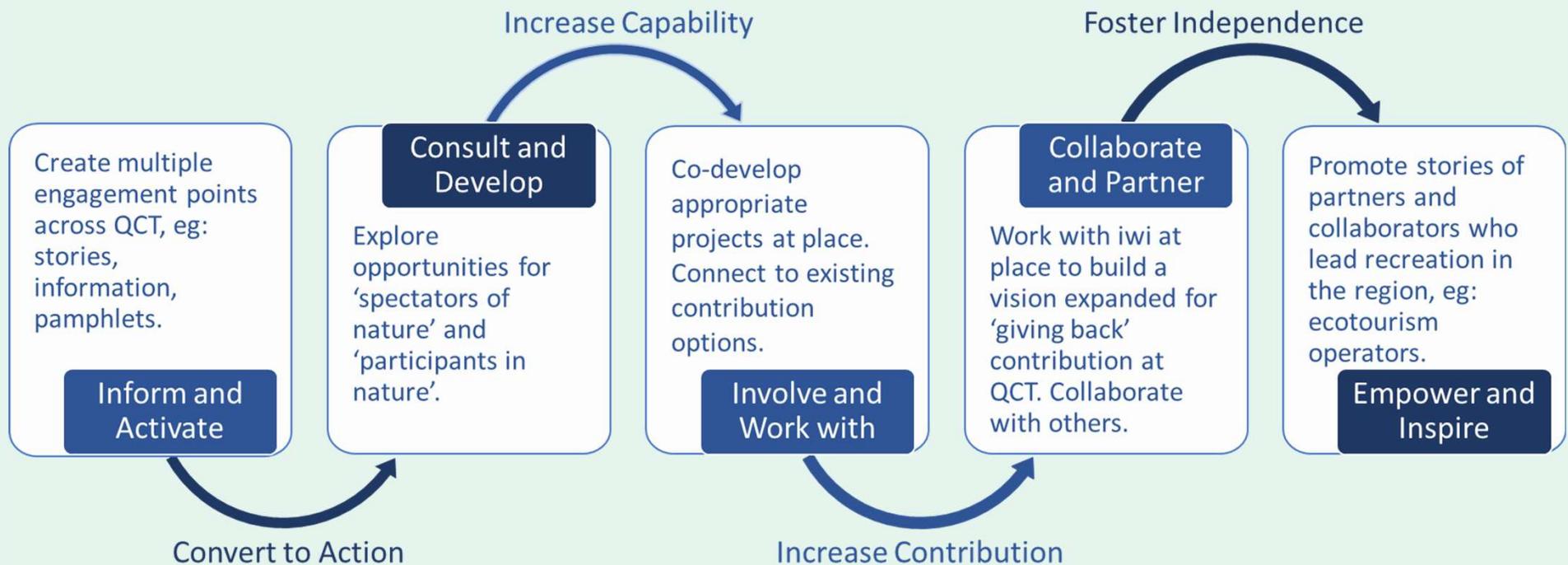
This is a visual guide for extensive and sustained participation in conservation across all sectors of community. People and communities can enter the spectrum at any stage, and the movement on the spectrum is dynamic and can go both ways. For example mana whenua starts in the 'Collaborate & Partner' space and may move towards leading independently on their constituents behalf.



Role modelling has the potential to activate a new sector of community

NB: DOC has adapted the IAP2 public participation frame to develop this 'engagement spectrum'

Applying the Engagement Spectrum to QCT



Facilitator for ‘giving back’

Interpretation and authentic storytelling are key to:

- communicating what is significant about places, people or events
- offering visitors insight into what’s special, how and why it’s protected and valued
- acknowledging people, places and things – both historic successes and failures⁹
- providing compelling reasons for visitors to connect to people, places and things
- encouraging visitors to engage in conservation and restoration by ‘giving back’.



- At the root of providing interpretation and authentic storytelling is supporting nature to thrive, through better understanding, appreciation and stewardship of New Zealand’s natural and cultural heritage.
- DOC’S Tiaki care code is an important tool for helping visitors understand and respect the values of QCT. Creating a Kaitiaki Whenua Ranger role at QCT could help deliver those values while ensuring local stories are shared appropriately.
- Rich visitor experiences connect visitors, support their wellbeing and, with the right tools, have potential for visitors to engage in ‘giving back’ through conservation and restoration activities.

There is a repeating message across both the literature and in DOC's experience that fostering environmental connection and action (or 'giving back') works best when people are engaged over an extended time and are able to build conservation skills that lead to visible and tangible success.⁴

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7. Appendix

These QCT insights link to wider work undertaken by DOC's Heritage and Visitors Unit:

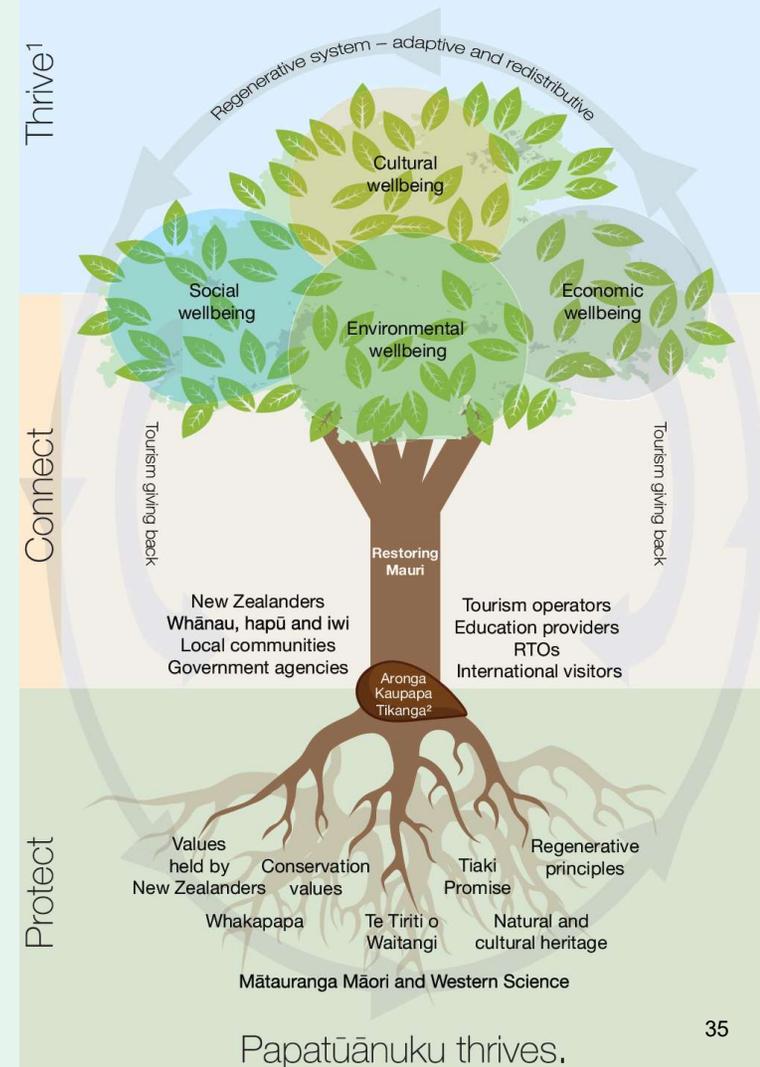
- DOC's position statement on the future of tourism – the purpose was to develop and integrate a view for the future of tourism in New Zealand. This provided a platform to influence the work of other agencies and the tourism sector. It is anchored in a te ao Māori perspective.
- A values-based tourism paper that shifts the focus from a 'high-value' visitor and a narrow lens of economic growth to a values-based system where tourism 'gives back' more than it takes. It is strongly anchored in regenerative principles.

Values-based tourism

‘Giving back’ to create a healthier tourism system.¹⁰

- DOC’s thinking on tourism proposes a shift from focusing on just visitors and economic value to a wider system-focused approach that recognises the importance of all wellbeings: environmental, social, cultural and economic.
- Using the analogy of a tree, the root structure is strong and extensive, prioritising values. Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a te ao Māori world view, along with tikanga values, are central within the root stem. The wisdom and knowledge of both Mātauranga Māori and Western Science offer ways to manage tourism to ‘give back’ more than it takes.
- Environmental wellbeing is foundational and tourism becomes a regenerative system with feedback loops shown through the arrows. ‘Giving back’ is the key mechanism to deepen visitors connection with nature and to care for the places they visit. This essentially shifts tourism from being an individual pursuit to becoming a collective responsibility.

Tourism gives back more than it takes.



Nudging visitors to care

Promoting intergenerational
environmental concern

- An academic research investigation (Syropoulos and Markowitz, 2021) shows people tend to “...discount future benefits of action relative to costs incurred sooner in time.”¹¹ Or, put another way, they’re less likely to give up present benefits for future benefits.
- However they point out that experiments within another study (Watkins and Goodwin, 2019) show that encouraging people to reflect on the sacrifices previous generations have made nudges them to consider responsibility towards future generations.
- And this “... could positively impact people’s willingness to take costly action to protect future generations from environmental harms.” Syropoulos and Markowitz’s research investigation is limited by available data, however they conclude that “... increasing and leveraging perceptions of responsibility towards future others may be a powerful tool for promoting intergenerational environmental concern and action.”¹¹



What this means for DOC:

- This academic research reinforces that there is potential to nudge visitors to consider their responsibility to future generations to care more for the places they visit. ‘Giving back’ could be the mechanism to demonstrate care.
- Design-thinking processes could be used to help identify the most effective activities across the 5 human dimensions in order to encourage visitor uptake.