

**JOBS**  
FOR NATURE

**MAHI**  
MŌ TE TAIAO



# Creating positive outcomes for businesses

A Jobs for Nature case study, 2020–2025







**Whatungarongaro te tangata,  
toitū te whenua**

As people disappear from sight,  
the land remains

Installing a gateway for Southern Lakes Sanctuary at Wye Creek as part of the Get Stuff Done project. Photo: Southern Lakes Sanctuary

## Jobs for Nature has created positive outcomes for businesses

In 2020, the world was navigating an unprecedented time. With Aotearoa New Zealand's borders closed, the business landscape suddenly looked quite different. Jobs for Nature emerged to stimulate the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The intention of the \$1.2 billion investment was to revitalise communities through nature-based employment. The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) allocated \$485.3 million of this fund to 225 projects with a wide range of conservation objectives.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector was particularly severe. International visitors to Aotearoa decreased

by 98.6%, and the number of people directly employed in tourism decreased by a third.<sup>1</sup> Some tourism and travel-related sectors (for example, tour operators and hospitality) saw an almost overnight drop in sales and business.

Jobs for Nature supported businesses affected by the pandemic to keep staff and created opportunities to develop a sustainable business beyond the Jobs for Nature funding, while connecting businesses to nature.

<sup>1</sup> [mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism/tourism-projects/governments-tourism-snapshot/the-outlook-for-new-zealand-aotearoa-tourism](https://mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism/tourism-projects/governments-tourism-snapshot/the-outlook-for-new-zealand-aotearoa-tourism)



## What we delivered

Jobs for Nature funding allowed 7,103 people to be employed, supporting regions, businesses, iwi and community groups.

Tourism, forestry and other businesses were able to retain staff, and staff were able to fit conservation work around business demands to retain customers and income.

As part of preparing business cases and running projects, business and entrepreneurial skills were developed for future prosperity.

Forty-six projects indicated a 'high' or 'reasonable' likelihood of commercialisation, potentially developing new businesses that contribute to the economy.<sup>2</sup>

A further 48 projects indicated they had either 'plans to commercialise but additional support would be required' or 'no current plans to commercialise but would like to in the future'. These projects developed valuable business skills in their journey.

## What we achieved

The positive effects of Jobs for Nature included:

Supporting businesses against the immediate disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

Providing new business opportunities

Highlighting the importance of nature for business



<sup>2</sup> Department of Conservation. 2022 Regional Investment Review – Survey undertaken by the Department of Conservation of 193 projects (unpublished).





## Supporting businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

The Jobs for Nature programme provided a lifeline, allowing businesses to keep their staff employed and retain communities at place.

The West Coast of the South Island was forecast to have one of the country's largest declines in employment due to the region's high dependence on international tourism. South Westland was hit particularly hard. At the time, 90% of the 510 residents of Franz Josef / Waiau worked in tourism-related jobs.<sup>3</sup>

The South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support project enabled 40 businesses to employ their staff to deliver conservation work tasks when there was not enough tourism work available to support full-time employment.



Fox Glacier Guiding team working on the Moraine Walk in the Fox Glacier / Te Moeka o Tuawe valley as part of the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support project. Photo: DOC

"We're very fortunate that we've held on with the minimal amount of crew that we need to operate and then are still able to keep them busy in work if they don't have enough skydives to complete that week."

*Lisa Chambers,  
Skydive Franz Josef  
& Fox Glacier<sup>4</sup>*

The project focused on creating jobs, enhancing skills, supporting conservation and stimulating economic growth in South Westland.

Through the project, Skydive Franz Josef & Fox Glacier was able to keep all 13 staff employed, fostering a sense of community and contributing to the resilience and recovery of the tourism community during and after the pandemic.

The outcomes assessment of the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support project<sup>5</sup> identified substantial benefits for the community and affected individuals. These included:

- economic stability through consistent income, reduced stress and increased confidence from meaningful work
- improved physical health from engaging in conservation tasks
- continued economic viability of businesses and improved tourism offerings in the region.

Additionally, the project promoted social cohesion and kept people in the community, which benefited services such as the volunteer fire service.

<sup>3</sup> [doc.govt.nz/50-jobs-for-nature](https://doc.govt.nz/50-jobs-for-nature)

<sup>4</sup> [rnz.co.nz/news/national/457429/franz-josef-fox-glacier-tourist-spots-prepare-for-summer-with-staffing-shortfalls](https://rnz.co.nz/news/national/457429/franz-josef-fox-glacier-tourist-spots-prepare-for-summer-with-staffing-shortfalls)

<sup>5</sup> Allen and Clarke. 2023. South Westland Jobs for Nature Outcomes Assessment. Wellington: Allen and Clarke. [mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/26513-south-westland-jobs-for-nature-outcomes-assessment-pdf](https://mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/26513-south-westland-jobs-for-nature-outcomes-assessment-pdf)



Waiheke Resources Trust site visit. Photo: Sustainable Business Network

In the north, Waiheke Island also relies heavily on the tourism and hospitality industries and was negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Waiheke Resources Trust received investment through the Partnering to Plant project, led by the Sustainable Business Network. Creating opportunities helped prevent people from leaving, which allowed local businesses to maintain their customer base and kept the local economy afloat. The project engaged people who would not normally work in conservation and who, when returning to their usual industry, took with them a new understanding and appreciation of the value of conservation.

“This project has had such a huge impact on our natural environment and our community. All new team members had been impacted by Covid, all in varying ways. Some were unable to find employment, others were working in forward-facing industries and were worried for their health. Some owned businesses that relied on tourism or wedding industries.”

*Kristin Busher,  
Partnerships Manager for  
Waiheke Resources Trust<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>6</sup> [sustainable.org.nz/projects/million-metres-streams/jobs-for-nature-mahi-mo-te-taiao](https://sustainable.org.nz/projects/million-metres-streams/jobs-for-nature-mahi-mo-te-taiao)





## Providing new business opportunities

By combining economic development with environmental goals, the Jobs for Nature programme ensured that new business ventures contributed to both economic growth and ecological sustainability. This dual focus will have helped build resilience against future economic and environmental challenges. Multiple examples can be found of new business ventures that emerged from business involvement in the Jobs for Nature programme:

- In Rotorua, Te Arawa Lakes Trust was able to recruit team members affected by the loss of tourism. The project worked with the regional and local councils in delivering services, such as wetland restoration, pest control and environmental monitoring, that were cost effective and of high quality. Both councils have maintained their contracts with the Jobs for Nature iwi project team for preserving and protecting the Rotorua lakes. The organisation is continuing to employ staff and has a sought-after skill set in the area. The Operational Manager of Te Arawa Lakes Trust says, “The iwi started with just two of us. Through J4N we now have 17 full-time and 35 part-time staff. These are staff numbers we will maintain with the contracts we have picked up for monitoring and maintenance.”<sup>7</sup> As a result, there has been an increase in the local conservation skills base, and further opportunities are available for local work.



Scrub clearing. Photo: Te Arawa Lakes Trust

- Arowhenua Native Nursery and Restoration is a Māori-led business dedicated to recloaking the whenua (land) with locally sourced native species. Founded in 2021 through Jobs for Nature and One Billion Trees funding, it has grown into one of Canterbury’s leading providers of eco-sourced native plants and restoration services. The project began due to the need for eco-sourced plants for the restoration of the upper and lower Rangitata River. With a target of growing 180,000 plants to go into the catchment, the project more than tripled this, producing over 600,000 plants. They have also provided predator control over the lower catchment to protect threatened birds nesting on the braided river. The nursery has now become commercially viable and continues to produce plants for customers in the area.

New businesses like this will support meeting the demand for eco-sourced plants and provide the skill sets needed for future large-scale restoration projects.



Arowhenua Native Nursery. Photo: DOC

<sup>7</sup> Allen + Clarke. [date unknown]. Jobs for Nature evaluation: Social Impact Thematic Case Study. Wellington: Allen + Clarke. [jobsfornature.govt.nz/assets/Publications/J4N-Social-Impact-Case-Study.pdf](https://jobsfornature.govt.nz/assets/Publications/J4N-Social-Impact-Case-Study.pdf)



Planting at Lake Waihola. Photo: Te Nukuroa o Matamata

- Te Nukuroa o Matamata project, led by Te Rūnaka o Ōtākou in the Waihora–Waipōuri wetland complex and lower Taieri catchment, has also created a new business opportunity. The 3-year project aimed to restore habitat and rejuvenate mahika kai (food-gathering places). Work included controlling pests, propagating and planting native plants, installing fencing, and carrying out ecological restoration work. Collaboration and engagement with organisations, businesses and other partners helped deliver sustainable and long-term change for the wetland. The skills and reputation the team has gained through the project have attracted additional business, which is enabling the group to operate independently. With support from the Jobs for Nature funding, this project not only achieved its conservation goals but also created future commercial interest.

In addition, projects have developed new commercial skills to support any potential future business prospects or growth. For example, preparing business plans, reporting and developing governance.





## Importance of nature for business

Recognising that nature is at the heart of the economy of Aotearoa and the way people do business here was important for a successful recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>8</sup> One of the main barriers to businesses investing in nature is a lack of understanding of how nature integrates with their business and the value it can provide.<sup>9</sup> Involvement in the Jobs for Nature programme tested thinking and encouraged businesses to explore different approaches, leading to further investment in nature:

- AJ Hackett Bungy, based in Queenstown, was one of many tourism businesses affected by the sudden loss of international tourists. It was important to keep skilled tourism industry workers in the area. By bringing the industry together, the Get Stuff Done project came to life. This workforce alliance, led by AJ Hackett Bungy, focused its attention on environmental projects, the provision of labour and back-office support, such as accounting and health and safety planning, to several Jobs for Nature projects. This included Southern Lakes Sanctuary, the Tucker Beach Habitat Restoration project and the Routeburn Dart Wildlife Trust. Through this collaboration, the company has seen the positive effect of conservation efforts in the community where it operates. It has since committed \$300,000 over 3 years to Southern Lakes Sanctuary. David Mitchell, CEO AJ Hackett Bungy New Zealand, says, “We’ve been privileged in enabling support for Southern Lakes Sanctuary by providing the operational horsepower and administrative expertise for their conservation project. We believe in the benefits these dedicated resources are providing to local conservation and we would like to see them continue.”<sup>10</sup>



Field crew installing traps in the Blue Valley for Southern Lakes Sanctuary as part of the Get Stuff Done project.  
*Photo: Southern Lakes Sanctuary*

Similarly, the outcomes assessment for the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support project showed that Jobs for Nature increased understanding of the value that businesses and individuals can have for conservation and the community. Equally businesses’ perceptions of the value of conservation for their businesses also improved. Other benefits included:

- engagement in conservation efforts helped build a positive brand reputation, which can attract customers who value sustainability
- businesses contributed to the long-term sustainability of the natural environment, which is crucial for those relying on natural resources or tourism
- contribution to the maintenance of assets such as the Alex Knob Track and, from this, continued interest in maintaining these local assets
- strengthened relationships through collaboration between DOC, businesses and mana whenua. This led to social and economic benefits being gained through collaborative business practices, such as client referrals. Evidence shows these practices are ongoing.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation. [doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020](https://doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020)

<sup>9</sup> Sustainable Business Network. 2023. Regenerating nature in Aotearoa New Zealand: the transformative role of business – what businesses need to increase action and investment. [nat\\_the-transformative-role-of-business\\_report-final\\_r.pdf](https://nat_the-transformative-role-of-business_report-final_r.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [lwb.co.nz/content/southern-lakes-sanctuary-to-receive-300k-boost](https://lwb.co.nz/content/southern-lakes-sanctuary-to-receive-300k-boost)





Waiheke Resources Trust site visit. Photo: Sustainable Business Network

## Nature is at the heart of the economy

Recognising that nature is an important part of the economy and the way people do business in Aotearoa was important for a successful recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>11</sup> Through the Jobs for Nature programme, businesses engaged with nature in new ways. This brought together communities and industries that likely would not have worked together otherwise. It tested thinking and enabled new businesses to form. Investing in people and nature has a good return on investment,<sup>12</sup> and businesses that can supply restoration goods and services will be needed to continue the restoration of Aotearoa.

Continuing to engage businesses in investing in nature will be essential for maintaining the positive benefits achieved.<sup>13</sup>

11 Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation. [doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020](https://doc.govt.nz/anzbs-2020)

12 Martin Jenkins. 2023. Jobs for Nature – Mahi mō te Taiao: understanding economic impacts of the programme – Final report. Wellington: Martin Jenkins. [MJ\\_FINAL\\_REPORT\\_J4N\\_Understanding\\_economic\\_impacts-2023.10.17.pdf](#)

13 [doc.govt.nz/always-be-naturing/get-your-business-naturing](https://doc.govt.nz/always-be-naturing/get-your-business-naturing)



# Appendix

Project name	Delivery lead	Amount awarded	Delivery term	Council region
South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support	Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai	\$3,780,000	4 years	West Coast
Partnering to Plant	Sustainable Business Network	\$5,080,000	3 years	Nationwide
Mauri Tu Mauri Ora	Te Arawa Lakes Trust	\$2,500,000	4 years	Bay of Plenty
Arowhenua Nursery	Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua Limited	\$2,751,000	3 years	Canterbury
Te Nukuroa o Matamata	Te Rūnaka o Ōtākou	\$5,000,000	3 years	Otago

COVER: The Inflight Skydive Franz Josef team upgrading the Alex Knob Track as part of the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support project.

Photo: DOC

Published by:

Department of Conservation

PO Box 10420

Wellington 6140

New Zealand

November 2025

Editing and design:

Te Rōpū Ratonga Auaha

Creative Services

R287225