



# Te Taiao Collectives

Communities joining forces for ecosystem restoration

National  
**Science**  
Challenges

NEW ZEALAND'S  
BIOLOGICAL  
HERITAGE

Ngā Kōiora  
Tuku Iho

Raven Cretney (independent researcher, Lincoln University) and Kiely McFarlane (Cawthron Institute) co-led the research and writing of this report. Research participants have had an opportunity to review and provide feedback on a presentation of key findings, but the analysis and any errors or omissions in this report remain the responsibility of the researchers.

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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Background.....	11
Report aims, scope and structure .....	13
Methodology.....	16
<b>Value and roles of restoration collectives</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Empowering collective action .....	25
Building relationships with decision-makers .....	28
Raising awareness and championing action.....	31
Supporting community initiatives.....	33
Co-developing shared visions and plans .....	35
Facilitating knowledge sharing .....	38
<b>Challenges faced by restoration collectives</b> .....	<b>41</b>
Managing people and relationships.....	42
Capability and capacity.....	44
Funding and resourcing .....	46
Restoration context.....	49
<b>Insights on shared learning networks</b> .....	<b>51</b>
The value of a shared learning network .....	52
Developing a shared learning network .....	57
Lessons for future shared learning networks and forums.....	64
<b>References</b> .....	<b>68</b>
Further reading: .....	70





# Executive summary

Community-based restoration and regeneration are increasingly common pathways for collective action on interconnected social and environmental issues. As community initiatives gain pace, the need for collaborative efforts that operate at landscape scales has grown. Restoration collectives have emerged as important organisations that aim to connect and support diverse community entities to work together toward shared restoration goals.

## Te Taiao Collectives Network

This study established a pilot shared learning network called 'Te Taiao Collectives Network' to investigate the role and contribution of collectives to landscape-scale restoration in Aotearoa. It also examined the potential for shared learning to support the work of collective leaders. The Network included more than 20 people representing 15 restoration collectives from across the country, and involved a co-design hui, five online wānanga and one in-person wānanga.

## Value and roles of restoration collectives

The findings of this research demonstrate the diversity of collectives operating in Aotearoa and highlight their important role in supporting and connecting community groups and restoration projects. These organisations are often place-specific but may work within and across regions. We identified six key roles that collectives contribute to community-based restoration:

1. Collectives connect community-based projects and organisations to **empower collective action for te taiao**.
2. Collectives **build relationships** between community entities and decision-makers, improving access to information and resources and facilitating joint advocacy for restoration.
3. Collectives **champion action** in their communities and beyond by raising awareness of local environmental issues and celebrating community successes.
4. Collectives **support community initiatives** to undertake their practical restoration work more efficiently and effectively.
5. Collectives use adaptive and flexible approaches to bring people together to **co-develop plans and visions**.
6. Collectives facilitate **knowledge sharing** and help connect those with expertise with those who need support.





**BUILDING  
RELATIONSHIPS**



**CHAMPIONING  
ACTION**



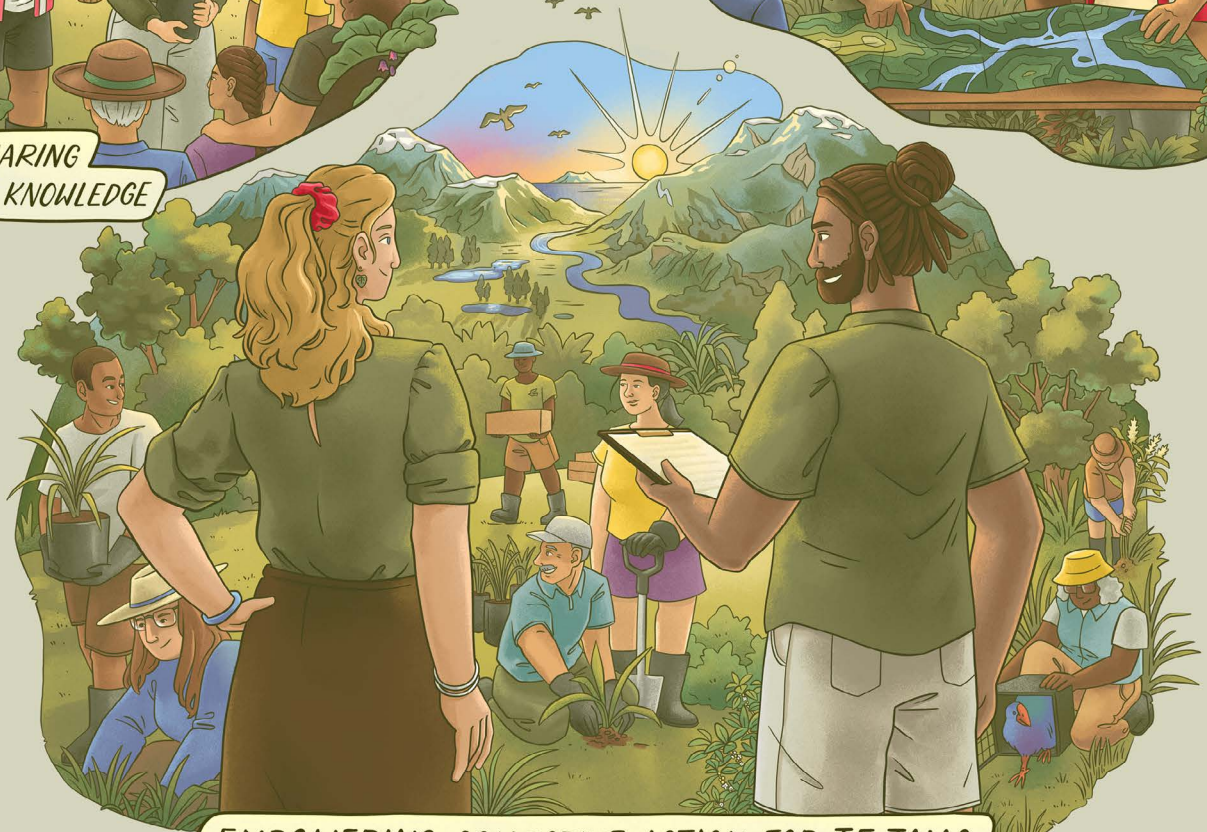
**SUPPORTING  
COMMUNITY  
INITIATIVES**



**CO-DEVELOPING  
VISIONS + PLANS**



**SHARING  
KNOWLEDGE**



**EMPOWERING COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR TE TAIAO**



## **Challenges and support needs for restoration collectives**

Restoration collectives face a range of challenges in their work. This study identified four key areas where collectives need further support to reach their full potential:

1. Collectives must invest in relationship building with a wide range of entities and manage numerous relationships to achieve collaboration and coordination across an area. Sustaining volunteer engagement and preventing burnout pose particular challenges.
2. Collectives' biggest challenge is securing sustainable funding and resourcing, and in particular the lack of long-term funding options for community-based restoration. There is also a lack of recognition of the specific and unique role of restoration collectives.
3. Collectives experience persistent capacity challenges, resulting in over-reliance on a few key individuals. Collectives are also under pressure to keep up to date with regulations and the latest developments in restoration science.
4. Collective leaders reported challenges working in restoration when many environmental crises are growing. This is draining and can make it difficult to know where to focus to make the most difference, especially in an uncertain legislative and funding context.

## **Developing a shared learning network**

This pilot study identified a range of lessons to inform the design and operation of shared learning networks of community environmental leaders. Collective leaders reported benefiting through learning from peers working on similar issues; connecting and building relationships; gaining reassurance and personal fulfilment; and reflecting on their collective's progress. Lessons learned focused on establishing a network and the organisation of wānanga as well as reflections on shared learning mechanisms, network size and relationship building.

### **Establishing a network**

- » Shared learning networks require adequate and sustainable resourcing and facilitation.
- » It is important to incorporate in-person gatherings, especially early in the process.
- » Incorporating elements of co-design strengthen the aims and processes for shared learning in a network.



### Running a network

- » Providing facilitation guidelines helps to establish a group culture and norms.
- » Choose learning topics based on the expertise and knowledge needs of members.
- » Interactive exercises are useful for building discussion but may not suit everyone and can encounter technology issues; it helps to have a back-up plan.
- » Provide time for members to connect and share updates to help build relationships.
- » Provide options such as video recordings to support wider knowledge sharing.

### Other elements of a successful network

- » It is not possible to make everyone happy all the time and this will inevitably mean some trade-offs in the content and structure of gatherings.
- » It is useful to have an easily accessible online location for sharing files and resources.
- » Producing high level summaries of topics and discussions is appreciated, especially if these resources use plain language and include visual elements such as diagrams.







# Glossary

<b>Co-design</b>	A participatory approach to research where end users collaborate in developing objectives and methods and interpreting results
<b>Collective action</b>	People with shared interests acting in concert towards a common objective
<b>Collectives</b>	Multiple community groups and other entities working together on a regular basis towards shared regeneration goals
<b>Collective leaders</b>	The collective coordinators, project managers, or chairs that participated in the pilot network
<b>Community-based restoration</b>	Restoration initiatives that are initiated outside of national and local governance organisations. They may be guided or assisted by larger organisations, but they are led by members of the community
<b>Community entities</b>	The community groups or organisations that comprise collectives, including local environmental groups, iwi, hapū, marae, community trusts, residents' associations, catchment groups and schools
<b>Landscape-scale restoration</b>	A holistic approach to restoration carried out over a large area with a similar mix of ecosystems and/or land uses
<b>Participants</b>	Individuals that participated in the research project through one or more of the co-design process, wānanga and focus group interviews
<b>Pilot network</b>	The network developed through this study to examine the feasibility and value of shared learning networks for restoration collectives
<b>Restoration</b>	The process of assisting the recovery of damaged, degraded or destroyed social-ecological systems in changing environments, for the benefit of people and nature.
<b>Shared learning network</b>	An organisational structure that facilitates reciprocal exchange of ideas and knowledge among peers and development of professional contacts
<b>Social learning</b>	Collective and individual processes of learning that result in change that is embedded in a wider context, for example a community
<b>Tangata whenua</b>	Local Māori with ancestral connections to a place
<b>Te Taiao</b>	The natural world
<b>Te Taiao Collectives Network</b>	The name of the pilot network established as part of the research project
<b>The Network</b>	Shortened form of Te Taiao Collectives Network.



# Section 1 | Introduction







## Background

Community-based restoration and conservation have long been identified as promising approaches to improving environmental and social wellbeing (Berkes 2004, Kittinger et al. 2016) and have made significant contributions to biodiversity protection in Aotearoa New Zealand (Department of Conservation 2021, Shanahan et al. 2021). Community-based initiatives focus on a diverse range of activities including ecosystem restoration, species translocation, catchment management and raising awareness through advocacy and education (Sinner et al. 2022b). The scale and complexity of environmental issues they address require collaborative and connected responses (Schoon and Cox 2018). Community-based approaches to restoration, in particular, require coordination across multiple ecosystems, scales, jurisdictions and institutions (Wyborn and Bixler 2013, Bodin 2017). Collaboration is also crucial for collective action that embraces diverse approaches, differing values, goals and viewpoints, and builds trust across organisations and sectors (Whitburn and Shanahan 2022).

Shifting policy and political agendas have promoted the devolution of conservation activities to local scales and non-governmental organisations over the last 30 years, resulting in growing issues of fragmentation and disconnection (Doole 2020). Local agencies have struggled to support landscape-scale conservation or maintain connections with the growing number of community initiatives, while such initiatives typically involve 'hyper-local' groups of volunteers focused on local reserves or sanctuaries (Goodwin et al. 2024). Consequently, community-based conservation is 'characterised by scores of disparate groups and individuals working often in complete isolation over landscapes' (Doole 2020: 5).





There are now increasing attempts to scale-up community-based restoration by forging connections across people, places and activities to improve social and ecological outcomes (Peltzer et al. 2019, McFarlane et al. 2021). In the last ten years, a growing number of 'hub', 'network' and 'catchment collective' organisations have emerged that aim to connect and support multiple volunteer groups, hapū, iwi and landowners (Peters 2019). We call these organisations that involve multiple community groups and other entities working together on a regular basis towards shared restoration goals 'collectives'. Many collectives are still in the early years of establishing their organisations (Peters 2019), and could therefore play a significant role in shaping the future of community restoration in Aotearoa.

Previous writing on collectives has celebrated their potential to develop more coordinated and collaborative action across different issues and at larger scales (Norton et al. 2016, Peltzer et al. 2019). Collectives tend to have broad social-ecological objectives that connect ecological and environmental goals with community building and social outcomes (Sinner et al. 2022b). Their emphasis on supporting collective action has also enabled new types of relationships and structures to emerge that reflect their social and environmental setting (McFarlane et al. 2021). Many iwi and hapū have established collectives to empower them in their tiaki taiao roles and to establish partnerships with other organisations (Warren 2010, McFarlane et al. 2021).

To deliver on these objectives, collectives must be able to work across a range of sectors while coordinating and supporting action being undertaken by community entities on the ground. They must also manage challenging funding and regulatory environments that are subject to uncertainty and change (Brown 2018). Earlier studies (Peters 2019, Doole 2020, McFarlane et al. 2021) provide insights on the emergence and purpose of collectives and value they add to community-based restoration. These studies highlighted that collectives are diverse, engaging different groups of people (e.g. hapū, urban residents) through different organisational structures (e.g. networks, partnerships) to focus on a variety of issues (e.g. freshwater fish, rural predator control). However they shared a common focus on supporting, connecting and advocating on behalf of community entities engaged in restoration work. McFarlane et al. (2021) concluded that by empowering community initiatives, collectives are helping to stabilise, speed up, grow and deepen social-ecological restoration. However, questions remain regarding the specific practices and strategies they employ to catalyse collective action, and their specific role in achieving restoration goals.

This report summarises the findings of a two-year research project investigating the potential of restoration collectives as a pathway to ecosystem regeneration, funded through Ngā Koiora Tuku Iho | New Zealand's Biological Heritage National Science Challenge. To both understand collectives' practices and strategies and help them to overcome barriers to collective action, this research used a 'social learning' approach. Social learning is commonly used to describe collective and individual processes of learning that result in change that is embedded in a wider context, for example, communities of practice (Reed et al. 2010, Turner et al. 2020). It is an interactive and dynamic process (Ernst 2019, Lumosi et al. 2019), involving 'groups, communities and

organizations collaboratively taking action based on a joint analysis of problems, their causes and solutions, and entering into learning partnerships to apply their knowledge innovatively' (Keen and Mahanty 2005: 105). The outcomes of social learning may extend beyond communal shifts in understanding and change to include greater relational capacity and capability, increased trust and greater insight into the causes and solutions to challenges (Reed et al. 2010, Turner et al. 2020).

For this project we collaborated with representatives of 15 restoration collectives from around Aotearoa to design a shared learning network. Shared learning networks involve cooperative peer-to-peer learning and have been identified as valuable for facilitating knowledge exchange and generation among environmental practitioners in the social learning literature (Pahl-Wostl et al. 2007, McKellar et al. 2014, Bradbury and Middlemiss 2015, Lawson et al. 2017). The Network, named Te Taiao Collectives Network by participants, was established to facilitate knowledge sharing and deliberation over collective approaches to restoration. Through regular network wānanga, the researchers collected data and observations to understand the role of collectives in community-based restoration and the challenges and opportunities they experience, as well as evaluate how social learning can support leaders to overcome barriers to collective action.

## **Report aims, scope and structure**

This report is part of a study funded through the Biological Heritage National Science Challenge to gain insights into practices and strategies for scaling up community-based restoration and how collectives can use shared learning to overcome barriers to restoration. The study established a pilot shared learning network of collective leaders to evaluate the potential for peer-to-peer networks to facilitate social learning for more effective collective restoration. This pilot network was intended to provide insights on the feasibility, value and requirements of setting up a long-term national scale network to empower restoration collectives.

## **Restoration collectives**

Restoration collectives are community organisations – typically charitable trusts or incorporated societies – that work with or alongside other community and government entities at large spatial scales (e.g. landscape, region, nationwide), providing support and additional capability to amplify their restoration activities.

According to earlier research by McFarlane et al. (2021) collectives typically:

- have one or more paid staff, such as a coordinator or project manager
- are governed by a board or committee
- are organised as a network, hub, forum, or through partnerships
- are mission-led, such as restoring an ecosystem or landscape, recovery of a species or pest control
- have a guiding strategy, vision, or plan
- are funded through a combination of government and philanthropic grants, local government budgets, donations, memberships, contracting and revenue generation
- undertake strategic activities such as public engagement, providing advice and support to groups and advocacy more often than 'on the ground' activities like pest control and tree planting.



## **This report addresses three key research questions:**

1. How are collective organisations in Aotearoa supporting communities to make progress on their social and ecological restoration goals?
2. What barriers and challenges do collectives experience in enabling collective action?
3. How can peer-to-peer learning support effective collective action for restoration in Aotearoa?

Section two of the report summarises six key roles that collectives play in community-based restoration in Aotearoa. Drawing on presentations and discussions held during network wānanga, together with focus group interviews at the conclusion of the study, we discuss the specific contribution and role of collectives in facilitating collective action for restoration. This includes supporting and connecting restoration work at landscape scales, building relationships, raising awareness and championing community action, supporting on-the-ground restoration, developing strategies and plans and facilitating knowledge exchange. This section provides insight on the practices and strategies employed by collectives and the value of their work in facilitating more interconnected, supported and well-resourced community-based restoration.

Section three explores the challenges that restoration collectives experience in facilitating collective action, based on barriers and support needs identified during wānanga. Four key areas where collectives face challenges in carrying out their work include managing people and relationships, building capability and capacity, accessing funding and resourcing, and dealing with complexity in ecosystem restoration. For each challenge we identify key ways that governments and other organisations could support restoration collectives in overcoming these challenges.

Section four presents insights from the pilot network, drawing on reflections from the researchers and focus group participants on the role of the Network in facilitating social learning. We discuss how the pilot network worked in practice and the potential for peer-to-peer learning to support restoration collectives in navigating barriers to collective action. Our analysis suggests four key ways in which networks can support collective leaders: facilitating knowledge sharing, building social connectivity, contributing to personal fulfilment and providing opportunities for reflection and validation. This section also provides insight into the lessons learned from running and facilitating a shared learning network, including what worked well for participants and elements that could be improved for future social learning initiatives.



**Te Taiao  
Collectives**

Communities joining forces for ecosystem restoration

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NEW ZEALAND'S NATIONAL HERITAGE  
Kaitiaki Take Kōwhiri

**1.** Introduction

**2.** Value and roles of restoration collectives

**3.** Challenges and support needs of restoration collectives

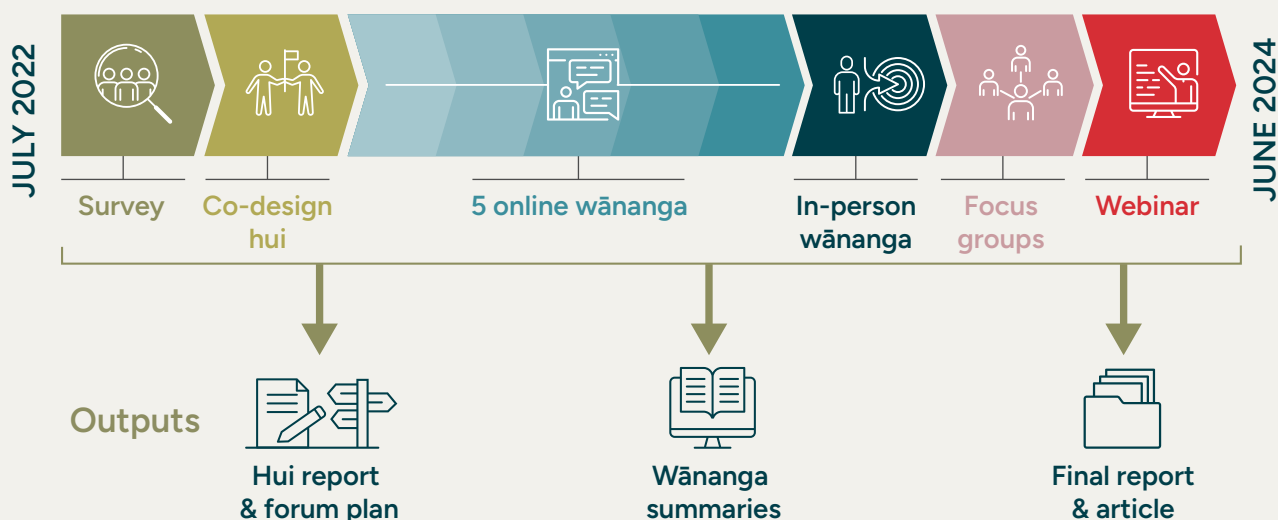
**4.** Insights from the pilot shared learning network



## Participants



## Pilot network process

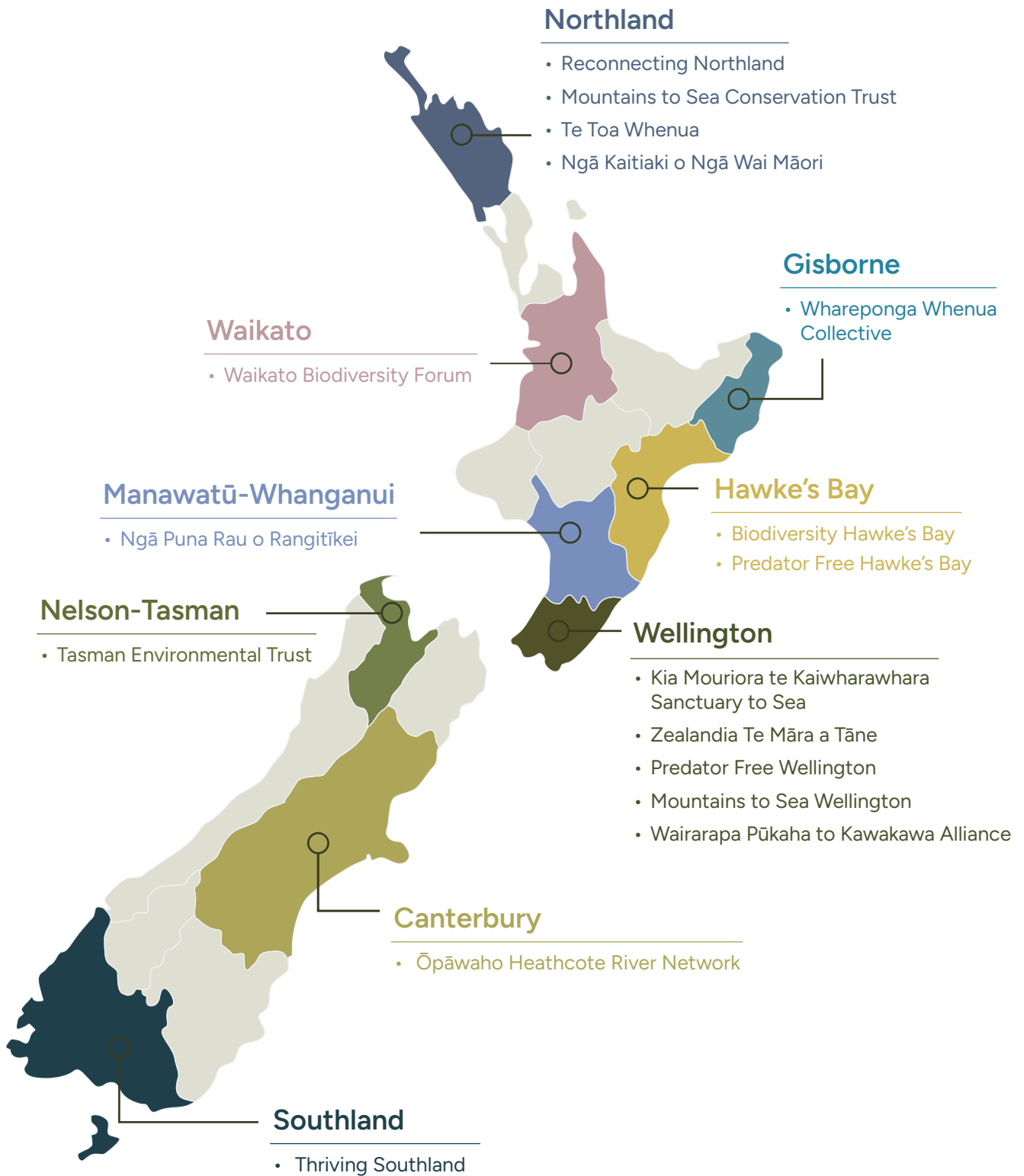


## Methodology

This research used an action research approach, described by Sinner et al. (2022a: 5) as involving ‘researchers and participants jointly undertaking interventions to improve real-life outcomes’ through ‘an iterative process of theorising, action, evaluation and learning.’ In this study, the researchers and participants came together to co-design, convene and evaluate a pilot shared learning network over a two-year period. The pilot network aimed to create an empowering space for leaders to connect, share experiences and lessons learned, and ask questions or seek resources to support their collectives’ efforts. Ethics approval for the research was granted through the Cawthron Institute Ethics process (CAW-ETH-220816).

The project involved five key components: an initial survey, a co-design hui, online wānanga, an in-person wānanga and focus group interviews. As the lead researchers, we gathered information over the course of the pilot project to: 1) share insights on community restoration emerging from the Network with collectives and other organisations; and 2) investigate the value of shared learning networks for community environmental leaders, including any design considerations. Outputs from this study include wānanga summary reports, this final report, a video and poster describing the roles and value of restoration collectives and a webinar.

## Locations of participating collectives







## Participating collectives

In July 2022 an expression of interest form was sent to representatives of 20 restoration collectives from across the motu – the majority of whom had participated in an earlier survey of collectives (McFarlane et al. 2021). As this study is a pilot project, collectives were selected to represent the diversity of organisation structures, composition, age, social-ecological foci and spatial scope of restoration collectives operating in Aotearoa at the time. This meant a mixture of hapū/iwi-led, regional and place-based collectives operating in rural and urban environments, and variously focused on restoring waterways, improving biodiversity and removing pest species. We also attempted to include collectives from locations across the country, though our desktop search identified few South Island collectives and even fewer had the capacity to participate. Sixteen collectives responded to the expression of interest and were invited to take part in the co-design process; one was unable to continue their involvement beyond the co-design hui due to other commitments. Over the course of the pilot more than 20 individuals representing 15 restoration collectives regularly participated in network activities, although not all individuals attended every gathering or event.

## Co-design process

On 5th-6th September 2022 17 representatives of restoration collectives gathered in Te Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington and on Zoom to co-develop the objectives and format of the pilot shared learning network. The hybrid format enabled flexibility and inclusivity in how collective representatives participated in the co-design process, and was enabled by having both in-person and online facilitators. Prior to the co-design hui, a short online survey had also been sent out to enable prospective network members to share their initial thoughts on the potential value of the Network, topics they would like to see discussed and the timing of wānanga.

Over the course of the two days, participants worked together to develop the objectives, format and operating principles for the shared learning network, which were written up as a plan that was then approved by all network members. Participants developed a name for the pilot network—Te Taiao Collectives Network—and set the following objectives:

1. To grow a network across Aotearoa that provides a place for collectives to connect, share knowledge and learn, to support their local restoration work.
2. To collate and create key resources that share information, experiences and stories to advance and support collective restoration within the network and beyond.
3. To grow our understanding of and confidence integrating mātauranga Māori in the network and our mahi.
4. To advocate to government and stakeholders to gain support for community-level biodiversity restoration.



Through the co-design survey and hui participants also agreed on:

- » a list of principles and practices for working together
- » a proposed format for wānanga, including the types of expertise to be shared, knowledge sharing and discussion activities and timing
- » network membership and roles
- » a list of wānanga topics
- » how knowledge shared during wānanga would be documented and disseminated
- » other mechanisms for connecting and sharing knowledge beyond the wānanga.

## Wānanga

Wānanga were held approximately every two months between November 2022 and November 2023. Five wānanga were held online via Zoom and one in-person wānanga was hosted by Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori in Whangārei. Each wānanga featured the knowledge, stories and challenges of a different subset of collectives and/or experts.

Collective representatives or other experts were invited to lead wānanga based on their expertise and experience of particular topics. Topics for each wānanga were proposed by the researchers based on the responses to the initial survey and feedback from collectives.



Wānanga topics included:

- » the evolution and growth of collectives
- » sustainable resourcing
- » facilitating engagement and collaboration
- » restoration planning
- » innovating for landscape restoration
- » understanding and engaging with mātauranga in restoration.

The wānanga used a combination of presentations, storytelling, facilitated discussions and Q&A, and interactive brainstorming tools to share and build knowledge among members of the collective. Following each session, the researchers produced a summary document that captured key learnings for collectives and support agencies (e.g. funders and government). These summaries were written to communicate ideas shared and developed in the wānanga with an external audience and were able to be shared widely. The researchers also produced detailed minutes that captured the details of presenters and group discussions. Detailed minutes provided an account of the insights shared and developed during the wānanga; they were shared among network members only.

## Focus groups

Towards the end of the pilot process the researchers conducted three focus group interviews with participants in the Network. Altogether, 11 individuals participated in the focus groups. These interviews were designed to understand the value of the shared learning network, the wider applicability of the pilot and any challenges that arose during the process. Focus group interviews involved a number of semi-structured questions in a facilitated discussion as well as Zoom polls for short answer or multiple-choice questions. Focus group discussions were professionally transcribed prior to analysis.

The content of these interviews was then analysed by the researchers alongside the wānanga summary reports and the minutes to understand the value and role of restoration collectives in Aotearoa more widely, and to stimulate reflections on the pilot network's operations and outcomes. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyse these data, drawing on an approach that systematically develops, analyses and interprets patterns across qualitative data sets. We followed the process discussed by Braun and Clarke (2021) to develop, refine and name themes in the data. This involved each researcher familiarising themselves with the data followed by an initial round of coding to identify patterns and themes. We then collectively generated initial themes, before developing and reviewing these and finally refining and naming each theme. This analysis provides the foundation for the remainder of the report. Quotes were selected to evidence and elaborate each theme and were reviewed by participants prior to publication. Some participants chose to have their quotes attributed to them by name, while others preferred to remain anonymous.

# Section 2 | Value and roles of restoration collectives



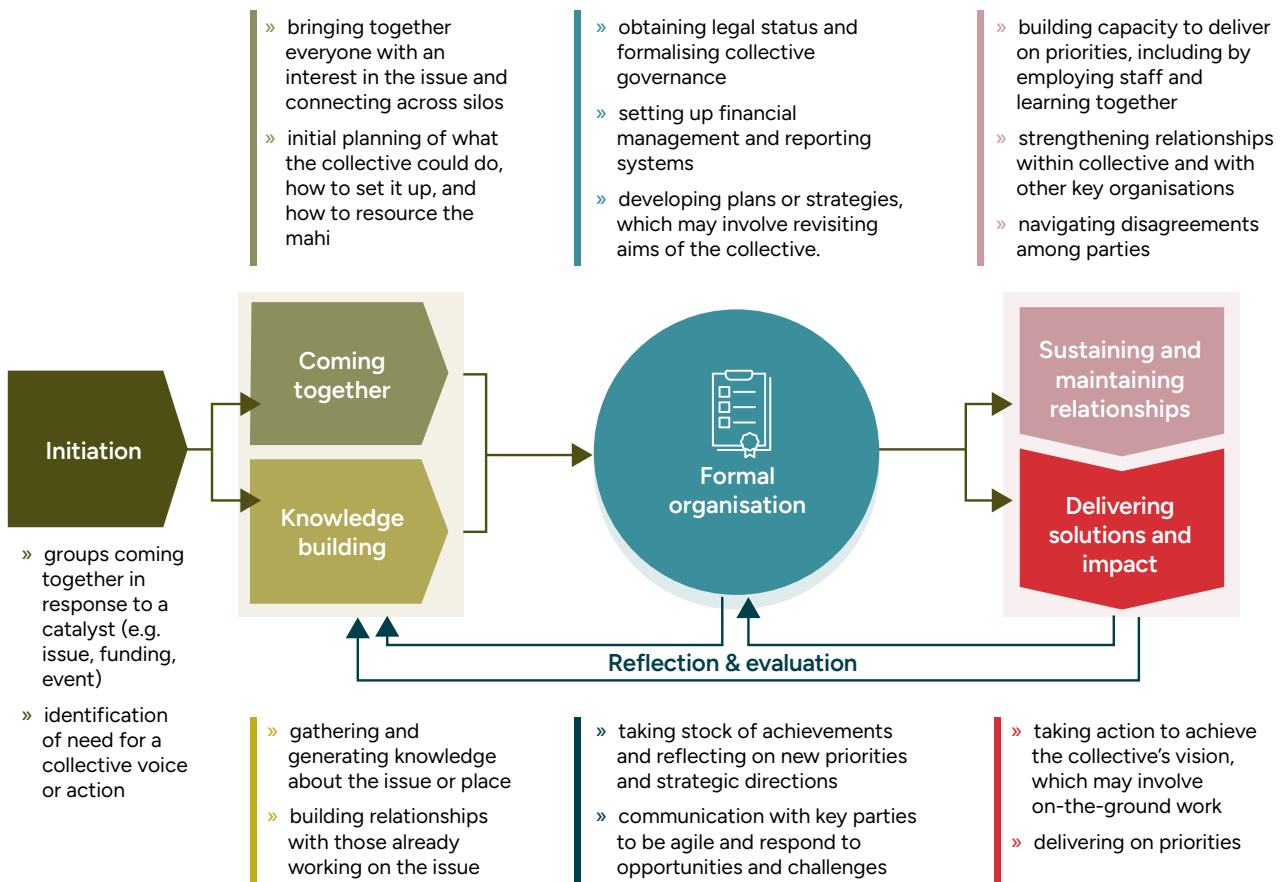




Through this research we sought to understand the value and role of collective organisations in the wider context of conservation and environmental governance. Working across landscapes and connecting organisations, projects and entities pursuing similar goals is important to tackle the fragmentation of many community conservation projects and undertake larger scale, more holistic restoration (Schoon and Cox 2018, Doole 2020).

Restoration collectives are diverse, evolving over time and in response to shifting aspirations and goals, and consequently use different approaches to restoration planning, monitoring, funding, communication with constituent entities and coordinating activities (Peters 2019). However, they all undertake their activities to amplify, empower or coordinate community-based restoration, and work alongside their constituent groups (McFarlane et al. 2021). To do so, some take the form of community networks, biodiversity hubs, catchment collectives, collaborative restoration projects or iwi or hapū collectives. Earlier research by McFarlane et al. (2021) developed a typology of models for scaling community-based ecosystem regeneration in Aotearoa: 1) tangata whenua-led collectives, 2) community networks, 3) project-based collectives, 4) agency-led collectives and 5) partnership initiatives. The study highlighted that while collectives' organisational structures and social-ecological foci vary, they share common goals around empowering community entities, improving ways of working and achieving large-scale ecological improvement. However, the study provided limited insights into the practices and strategies collectives use to achieve these goals.

## Common stages in the evolution of collectives



Through our research we identified six key roles that collectives fulfil in responding to the environmental and social needs of their communities. Restoration collectives are diverse and often place-specific, so the key role they play varies with their location (e.g. urban, rural), communities, ecosystems and organisational goals. Broadly, however, restoration collectives are focused on supporting, enabling and empowering community action for social-ecological regeneration. This can include a focus on building relationships; connecting work happening on the ground with decision-makers, the public and other partners; promoting and advocating for particular types of restoration (e.g. predator eradication); supporting restoration work in the community; providing administration support; and developing strategic plans or foci for landscape-scale restoration. These activities provide immense value towards the wider mission of community-based restoration, by bringing together, supporting and coordinating what can often be disparate and fragmented environmental actions in a manner that meets the specific needs of communities and landscapes.

In the remainder of this section, these support activities are distilled into six roles through which restoration collectives contribute to community-based restoration.





These six key roles are:

- » empowering collective action
- » building relationships with decision-makers
- » raising awareness and championing action
- » supporting community initiatives
- » co-developing shared visions and plans
- » facilitating knowledge sharing

Each role is summarised in an illustration to depict how collective organisations (shown as people in green) work with their community entities and other organisations to advance communities' social and ecological goals. The supporting text describes the scope of each role, drawing on network members' reflections on their and their organisation's work to identify the practices and strategies involved and the importance of each role.

## 1. Empowering collective action

Restoration collectives play a key role in supporting and connecting action for restoration across communities, regions and landscapes. This approach enables collectives to build momentum and strategic direction for restoration at multiple scales, creating a form of social infrastructure that enables and supports restoration in different contexts. Collective leaders often invoked ideas of landscape-scale, holistic and connected restoration as a key source of motivation and inspiration driving their work.

How collectives support and connect restoration across their local area or region varies (see McFarlane et al. 2021). For example, some collectives use a network approach (i.e. a hub that connects otherwise independent groups) to share and disseminate information on restoration initiatives and events across a region. Many hold events to bring community entities together and enable them to connect and share updates on initiatives underway. Others bring together constituent groups working on different aspects of environmental issues in a region to provide a collective voice for change. Yet other collectives take a more direct role in connecting action and promoting collaboration among groups. For some this means facilitating collective action on a specific mission, such as predator eradication, by diverse groups and organisations working in an area. For others it involves working with communities and organisations to initiate collaborative projects at ecosystem or landscape scales. What all of these approaches have in common is a focus on building recognition of the multiplicity of restoration initiatives underway, fostering connection between entities and initiatives, and cultivating a sense of shared purpose.





Broadly, we identified two central functions in this support and coordination role: building a more connected restoration community and promoting collective action for landscape restoration. First, collective leaders described relationship building and connecting people and organisations working towards similar goals as crucial for more joined up and holistic restoration. Belinda Sleight (Biodiversity Hawke's Bay) highlighted the importance of *"build[ing] the community of leaders [and] groups out there doing the work,"* while another stated that they see one of their key roles as *"connecting people and providing opportunities to connect, talk and meet."* For many collective leaders, building connectivity involves recognising the interconnected social and ecological goals important to communities. While restoration is often described in ecological terms, collectives recognise that *"people are inherent to our work,"* and that *"creating connected communities is a key aspect of what we are trying to achieve."* Several collective leaders also highlighted the importance of restoration action that supports livelihoods and the continuation of cultural knowledge and traditions.

Fostering connectivity is therefore as much about recognising the interconnectedness of different goals and activities (e.g. cultural harvesting, environmental monitoring) as it is about building relationships between entities with similar goals and activities (e.g. pest eradication and hunting groups). By appreciating the social goals and outcomes of restoration, collectives can help to connect with people who have not been involved historically in restoration and thus build more inclusive restoration initiatives that generate broad benefits for communities. As one collective leader said, *"collective action brings collective rewards. Not only can you do so much more when everyone chips in but everyone then gets to experience the thrill and the joy of the outcomes you achieve."*

Second, connecting community entities was seen as important for promoting collective action across a region or landscape. While community entities often work independently, building connections and sharing information helps to develop a shared direction for restoration. Belinda Sleight described her role as *"making sure that people are all pulling in the same direction,"* whether that means coordinating community efforts or empowering diverse voices to speak on an issue. Collectives' work to bring people together was identified as important for motivating and sustaining collective action, by creating a sense of solidarity and momentum among disparate groups and providing opportunities to learn from one another. Hona Edwards (Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori) highlights that collective action requires an ongoing process of relationship building:

*Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori, a collective of five hapū, have built an enduring relationship beginning 2012. Te Uriroroī, Te Parawhau, Ngāti Kahu O Torongare, Ngāti Hau and Te Orewai hapū have had to build and strengthen our relationships in order to take a collective, rather than an individual approach to the issues that brought us together.*



Additionally, collectives are often slightly removed from 'on the ground' work and therefore able to identify potential connections between initiatives and opportunities to scale up action. One participant described how they had worked with several neighbouring groups to create a restoration corridor, noting: *"to have organisations that sit slightly separately who can see those opportunities, that's really useful."* Collectives frequently provide leadership in restoration, catalysing action in areas that other organisations or institutions may not be working on. For instance, one collective leader described how their business engagement strategy has allowed them to *"take leadership in a more active way rather than some of the other projects which require leadership from government or council to activate."* Another commented that by role modelling 'working together' with other organisations, their collective was able to gain greater community buy-in for their restoration activities.



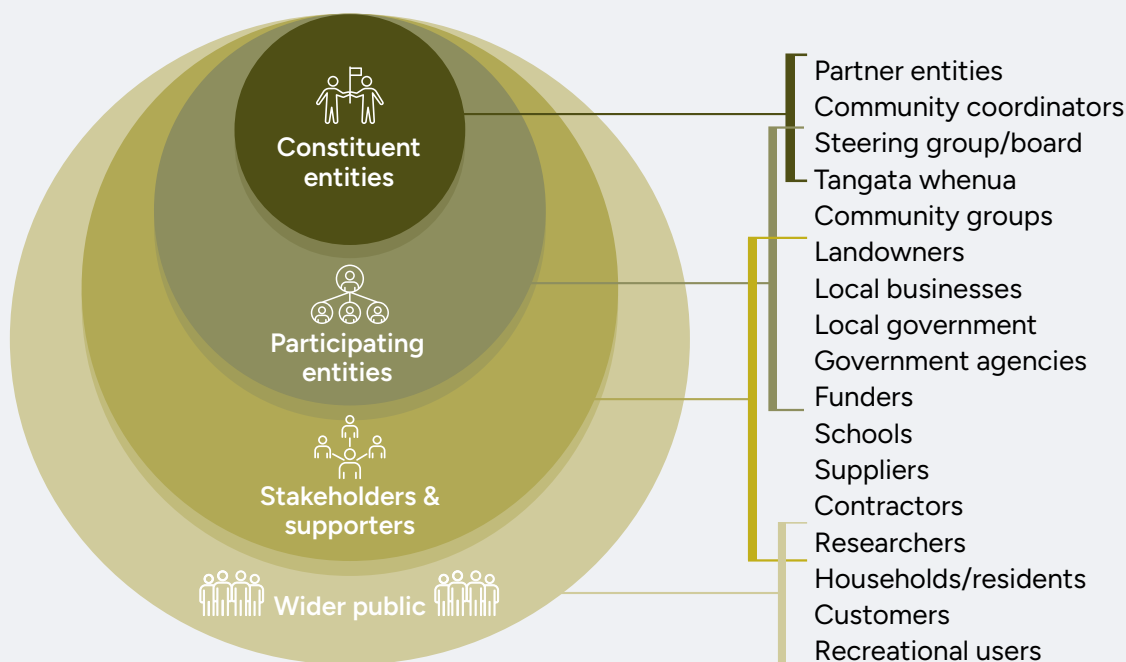
## 2. Building relationships with decision-makers

Many restoration collectives play a key role in connecting community entities with decision-makers across institutions and at different scales of governance. Individual community entities are not always able to dedicate time and resources towards building relationships with numerous governance officials, funders and other agencies. In contrast, relationship building is central to collectives' work, and collective leaders commonly have connections to mana whenua, local governments, central government agencies, large non-governmental organisations, businesses and funding agencies. Being part of a collective means that community entities are able to benefit from these relationships through increased access to information, resources and communication channels. Many collectives employ coordinators or administrators whose role involves building knowledge of and connections to funders, service providers and relevant government staff. Many collectives are thus able to support community entities in applying for funding and permissions to undertake their restoration activities and in accessing training and other forms of government support.



Some collectives are also able to use their connections and relationships to coordinate a joint message to agencies in order to advocate for change. This can be beneficial for building relationships with people in governance institutions while also presenting a strong collective voice on important issues. As Esther Dijkstra (Wairarapa Pūkaha to Kawakawa Alliance) reflected *“being a collective of voices, you can come out as one voice and put pressure... it helps to be together.”* In doing so, restoration collectives provide avenues for organisations and communities to feed into discussions with decision and policy makers that they may not have otherwise had access to. For decision-makers, collectives represent an efficient and often trusted pathway to connect with and gain input from a broad range of community entities. As Belinda Sleight commented *“we need strong community voices [that are] loud and that show the diversity of what’s going on out there and can be regionally or more locally responsive.”* One collective uses the metaphor of an oreo to represent their role, which they describe as *“the icing in the middle”* between the two biscuits of decision-makers and key governance agencies on one side and community groups on the other.

### Nested scales of engagement for restoration collectives



Collective leaders also spoke about the importance of working alongside and building relationships with iwi and hapū. Many volunteer groups desire a relationship with tangata whenua to understand how restoration activities align with their aspirations and knowledge. While engaging numerous groups individually may drain iwi/hapū resources, collectives can provide a simplified pathway for building relationships. Leaders of iwi and hapū collectives noted the need to work alongside the diversity of community, governance and other entities in their rohe to achieve their objectives. Relationships





with the Crown are of particular importance to some collectives in this context, as Hona Edwards explained:

*From a tangata whenua perspective, the Te Tiriti document should guide a productive and equitable relationship. Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori have over the last 12 years worked hard to build and maintain positive relationships with a number of key players to achieve successful outcomes for our goals. These include government agencies, councils, Fonterra, farmers, schools, research institutes, marae etc. NKONWM continue to strive for a much closer and direct relationships with the government regarding guaranteed and enduring fiscal support so that we may continue our work for future generations.*

Collectives frequently work across multiple scales of engagement, connecting community-based restoration to different levels of governance. In bringing together entities that were previously fragmented or working in isolation, collectives act to catalyse connectivity across diverse communities, agencies and sectors as well as different spatial scales and across landscapes. They are thus able to connect communities with decision-makers to support more locally targeted action, and to promote the sharing of information and resources between sectors.


### 3. Raising awareness and championing action

Restoration collectives play a central role in championing environmental action in their communities and beyond. This includes raising awareness of local environments and environmental issues, celebrating the success of community organisations and advocating for restoration activities. Collectives often have strong skills in public engagement and maintain a wide range of relationships with agencies, community organisations and local businesses. Leaders highlighted the importance of their everyday work to sustain these relationships for their ability to raise awareness of environmental issues and community needs and gain support for more action on the ground. They also noted the importance of celebrating success and sharing positive impact stories to build momentum and encouragement for long-term restoration.

Collectives use a range of approaches to engage their publics and other sectors, including the development of education programmes with local schools, creating opportunities for local businesses and researchers to be involved in restoration and working with artists to develop creative community engagement events and campaigns. Among these strategies, many participants agreed that *“one of our key tools is events...it’s really just connecting our community and getting our message out there and that [can] lead to people wanting to be involved and volunteering.”* Collectives also use social media and other communication platforms to raise the profile of local species and ecosystems and showcase local initiatives to encourage people to reconnect with their environment.







Collective leaders emphasised the importance of this engagement role for collective action for restoration:

*We talk about engaging community members and doing that work, it's no longer within just DOC or the regional council's remit to do that. I think there's a huge opportunity and a huge need for more engagement of people.*

This emphasis on (re)connecting communities with their environment is paramount to iwi and hapū-led kaitiaki collectives, whose restoration mahi enable hapū to maintain a connection to people and place. As Hona Edwards explains:

*Hapū-led initiatives are tikanga we as tangata whenua enjoy, when sharing mātauranga with our community. We do this because we are all responsible for a healthy taiao. From a tangata whenua perspective our understanding of our relationship to the taiao, through whakapapa, is key to advocating for and on behalf of te pu taiao.*

As noted earlier, many collectives are motivated by the social as well as environmental outcomes of restoration, from wellbeing benefits to building community and investing in local people. Community engagement has an important role to play in securing those social outcomes, as described by Chantez Connor-Kingi (Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori):

*For hapū it's mahi that is a lifetime, but it's making sure our next rangatahi are encouraged in this kaupapa, what is the end goal that we need to achieve, what are the career pathways in this mahi also.*

In championing action, collectives develop important skills in public engagement and building relationships with a wide range of partners such as funders, businesses, researchers, iwi and hapū, schools and other community organisations. In doing so, collectives are able to not only build community buy-in for their work but also support the wider community to understand the issues many groups are working on. As one collective leader said, engagement is important for “*capturing hearts and minds of our communities.*” This can include making the case for more resources from government, industries and businesses as well as raising awareness about projects and events to build wider support for restoration investment. Collective leaders also described the importance of their work in terms of raising awareness of complex environmental issues and the need for widespread action to make a difference on these issues.

## 4. Supporting community initiatives

For most restoration collectives, one of their key roles is to support community groups to undertake the 'on the ground' restoration work they are passionate about. There are a diverse range of approaches that collectives use to support constituent groups, from providing administrative infrastructure and advice to facilitating access to tools and practical resources. Collective leaders often spoke of their efforts to support community action and create a smoother process for groups to carry out their work, particularly in the context of increasingly complex regulations and funding requirements. In playing this support role, collectives are guided by their communities' needs and aspirations. As Richard Kyte (Thriving Southland) said, *"one of the keys to success has been from the very start it's about what the people on the ground want."*

This focus on providing support generally means that restoration collectives are not themselves running or delivering projects on the ground. For example, as Belinda Sleight said *"we don't manage projects ourselves. But what we do is support the community members who are doing that. This is really a way of trying to get more people out there into the environment, doing the doing."* Andrea Booth (Reconnecting Northland, Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust) similarly described her organisation as a *"connectivity catalyst...We're not necessarily doing the work ourselves on the ground but we're supporting and facilitating others to do that."* At times, this approach can cause challenges (see [Section 3](#)) but it also provides significant benefits, particularly for volunteer organisations that have less capacity or resources for administrative tasks or whose interest lies in practical restoration work.







Collectives often assist community entities with applying for and managing funding, reporting, accessing supplies, navigating health and safety regulations, gaining site access/permissions and other organisational operations (e.g. becoming a trust, contracting). In most collectives these tasks are undertaken by a paid coordinator and/or administrator whose role includes supporting community groups, though in some collectives it is provided by volunteers or contractors. Administrative support for smaller, more grassroots groups can help to overcome a number of barriers to restoration, particularly in light of changing regulations and increasing administrative requirements. As one collective leader described:

*for small community projects to set up as an incorporated society or a charity themselves, to have a treasurer, to meet health and safety regulations, to have insurance is really difficult... I think in that space, there's a huge future for collectives to support that kind of grassroots work.*

Many restoration collectives also provide practical tools and restoration expertise for smaller organisations and constituent groups. One participant said that their organisation provides tools and equipment (e.g. spades, monitoring kits) to groups in their collective and after asking what else they needed, put together a 'morning tea kit' for groups that proved very popular. The morning tea kit included a thermos, table and other supplies to host social gatherings at volunteer events, something that was seen as very important for caring for volunteers and keeping them engaged. Collectives also provide valuable expertise and skills to support community restoration initiatives with communications, planning, monitoring, project evaluation and reporting. For example, several collectives support their constituent groups to prepare content for newsletters and articles, or end of project reports. Many restoration collectives include members with specialist skills in project management, environmental science or mātauranga Māori, while others are able to leverage their connections and resources to bring in experts or training providers (such as The Nature Conservancy). This additional capability is invaluable for groups seeking to enhance the social and environmental outcomes of their restoration activities.

## 5. Co-developing shared visions and plans

Collectives play a key role in leading and supporting the development of community visions, strategies and plans for landscape restoration. As noted earlier, collectives seek to empower collective action by connecting community entities and fostering a shared direction for restoration. A key way they do this is through working with communities to co-develop a strategic focus that guides and unites their restoration activities, and that both builds on existing gains and will help to mobilise more connected action. For example, planning processes can catalyse new regional or mission-led projects that capitalise on existing work in a way that unites entities working towards similar aims.

As part of co-developing a vision, strategy or plan, many collectives draw on adaptive and flexible planning processes that engage a diversity of community representatives. Such processes support communities to identify shared goals, think over longer time frames and incorporate diverse knowledge and experiences. As most restoration collectives take a wide view of restoration that incorporates social, cultural and environment aspirations, they are well placed to help prioritise and catalyse action that addresses the needs of their communities. Collectives are also able to leverage their skills and resources to engage in research and monitoring and bring in subject experts, providing additional information to support restoration planning and decision-making. Many collectives undertake regular outcome monitoring to inform the evaluation and adaptive management of restoration activities.






Collective leaders frequently spoke of the importance of bringing together community entities to connect, identify shared goals and mobilise more effectively to achieve them. One collective leader reflected, *“where as individual iwi we were struggling, as a collectivised iwi, we all of a sudden started getting us some real momentum.”* Developing a shared vision can help to set a direction for action and coordinate efforts across groups from different backgrounds. For example, the same iwi collective leader is now connecting with a local catchment collective to identify how they can work together: *“importantly what we’ve been working through with our farmer collective was trying to find a shared vision, making sure that if we’ve got that shared vision collectively, then we can come up with a good working model.”*

### Common elements of planning among restoration collectives



Processes of creating visions and plans also encourage communities to take a long-term perspective on restoration and think strategically about what actions are needed over what timescales to achieve restoration goals. This need for an intergenerational perspective was frequently stated by iwi and hapū collective leaders, who spoke about



the importance of looking back to understand the future. Hona Edwards highlighted that for iwi and hapū, care for te taiao has no end date:

*Staff from the Crown (government) and its agencies will continue to change through political elections and job changes, creating inconsistency in policy and funding resource available to roopu kaitiaki, such as Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori and others, to continue on with our mahi with certainty of financial support. Like the tuna, have to find a way around any obstacle to survive, and unlike the Crown and its agencies, tangata whenua will always be here, this will never change, we are the only constant factor. We must continue to forge positive relationships and processes if we are to achieve a healthy pu taiao (environment) for all community.*

*E ai kī te whakataukī:      Taiao ki te tangata  
   Tangata ki te taiao.*

Developing a strategic focus can also include forging stronger connections between existing projects and supporting them to scale up. Collective leaders highlighted the strategic necessity of scaling restoration activities to respond to interconnecting social and environmental problems: *“obviously, the idea of a collective is to bring things together to scale up, so I think that’s what it’s all about for the future of our country and the globe.”* In an ecologically fragmented and under-resourced conservation sector, connecting existing projects is vital to efficiently scaling up restoration work and improving its outcomes. As collectives operate at large spatial scales they are frequently able to see the bigger picture and identify opportunities where small adjustments could provide greater benefits. In one example, *“by [both groups] shifting their boundaries a little bit, they can meet up and now we have a much larger corridor of work.”*

Building a shared vision or strategic focus can also strengthen less-tangible aspects of restoration such as advocacy and community building. Operating as a collective rather than as individual organisations and uniting around a shared vision for a region or area was seen as powerful for both the community and when engaging with government and funders. Collective leaders also spoke about the potential for visioning processes to inspire communities and motivate action, for example, *“it’s super helpful to have a 100 year vision that pushes the imagination out.”* While some collectives draw on more formal processes to co-develop these shared visions and plans, others take an approach of *“fire, aim, ready”* that leverages existing community action and opportunities to develop pathways forward. Being able to connect work happening on the ground, think over longer time frames and see the wider picture for restoration in a place or region means that collectives contribute important, and arguably necessary, skills to maintain the momentum of restoration in a way that *“unifies people and provides consistency over long periods of time.”*




## 6. Facilitating knowledge sharing

Restoration collectives provide important forums for learning and knowledge exchange, including facilitating cross-cultural learning. Throughout wānanga and focus groups, collective leaders spoke of the different ways their organisations share knowledge with others as well as the importance of learning for their own growth and development. Sharing knowledge and learning from others provide the foundations for collaboration, which is a cornerstone of many restoration collectives. As Esther Dijkstra leader reflected, *"collaboration is an active verb... You have to do it together and it's a learning process."*

Collective leaders generally discussed three types of knowledge sharing for restoration: technical and operational knowledge, restoration specific expertise and cross-cultural learning. Sharing technical and operational knowledge, such as how to prepare successful funding applications or what approvals are needed for different restoration activities, is a key way in which collectives support community-based restoration. By investing in skilled employees and training and by building experience, collectives have the skills and knowledge to assist community entities to navigate complex administrative and financial systems. Collectives also support community entities to share operational knowledge and learn from one another's experiences by convening community forums and working groups.

Collective leaders also described their role in sharing insights and facilitating knowledge exchange on topics related to restoration science and practice. Some collectives have active relationships with and involvement in research projects, while others contribute to citizen science and monitoring programmes.





Restoration science remains a new and dynamic field, and community groups often require help with understanding the science and its implications for their work. A collective leader described their role in this context as not only transmitting information but also encouraging innovation: *“enabling [community groups] to do their work, helping them... and that also includes being an incubator for new ideas and new thinking.”* These forms of knowledge exchange were not seen as one directional but rather part of a reciprocal learning process between restoration collectives, community groups, individuals and the wider community. As one participant said: *“we’ve got to learn from our communities, from our relationships and take all of that on board.”*

An important aspect of knowledge sharing for restoration is developing place-specific and culturally relevant understanding of both issues and potential solutions. Knowledge exchange is important for connecting people from diverse backgrounds with different areas of expertise and experience, and thus bringing them closer together. For example, an iwi collective leader described how they had been supporting a local farmer collective *“to have a really good understanding of iwi values and also we’re immersing ourselves into their hui [and] having regular meetings with these guys. They’re starting to talk to us about Te Mana o te Wai.”* Collectives also collaborated with other organisations and scientists to generate place-specific knowledge as part of research projects. These collaborations not only helped to contribute to restoration science but also to develop their own approaches. For example, a collective leader noted that the research part of one of their projects was *“quite new and innovative”*, enabling the review of previous projects to inform future work. It promoted *“a really adaptive approach to what the project requirements were year on year.”*

The potential for collectives to promote cross-cultural learning and respect for mātauranga Māori also recurred in discussions of restoration and collective action. Iwi and hapū collective leaders highlighted the importance of place-specific knowledge and histories in guiding restoration work, including an understanding of the ongoing implications of colonisation and relationships with the Crown. They described how they used their mātauranga-a-iwi and -a-hapū to inform their collectives’ restoration strategies and actions. For example, Chantez Connor-Kingi shared how they built their partnerships based on the needs of their taiao:

*from a hapū lens, we usually are quite reliant on our maramataka, what the taiao is telling us – what is the purpose and what is the objective – and then building those relationships and partnerships to actually inform the outcome.*

Pia Pohatu (Whareponga Whenua Collective) described how mātauranga-a-hapū is also integrated into their restoration work through cultural practices:

*back at the hapū level [our focus] is to remain cooperative and collective, with our language and traditions continuing. [This includes] our, what we call mahinga kai practices - or how we gather, harvest, preserve kai, and a new one that we’ve been able to coin now is around landscape-scale restoration, which is a big challenge for us.*



Hona Edwards noted that:

*sharing mātauranga Māori with partner entities... in reality it's about learning from each other. Western science practitioners and government and its agencies must make a concerted effort to learn and to genuinely understand and comprehend tangata whenua values and tikanga, and what we mean about our whakapapa to all of te taiao.*

Many Pākehā and Tauīwi collective leaders expressed a desire to learn more about mātauranga Māori and the history of their region to inform their collectives' relationships and practices. In the co-design hui, collectives recognised that they need to grow their understanding and confidence engaging with mātauranga Māori in order to facilitate culturally appropriate knowledge exchange within their community. Some collectives already have strong relationships with local iwi and hapū whereas others noted that this was an area they wanted to develop. These relationships shape the practices of collectives and help to inform their restoration programmes to account for iwi and hapū capacity. For instance, one collective leader reflected that working with iwi:

*is really important and [something] that we're really passionate about; it's also really important that we match iwi capacity and timeframes as there are a lot of people and projects wanting to work with iwi so they are stretched. ...we're really fortunate to have iwi representation at our highest level on our board and that just helps ensure it is not us dictating the terms and we can work to iwi capacity and not the other way round.*


Collectives without strong iwi or hapū representation also provided examples of ways collectives can help to promote appropriate cross-cultural learning, such as providing Te Tiriti training to members, following local tikanga in community hui, engaging with kura kaupapa Māori and featuring local Māori knowledge holders in knowledge-sharing events.



## Section 3 | Challenges faced by restoration collectives







Restoration collectives face a range of challenges in their work to support, coordinate and champion action in their communities. Some of these challenges reflect institutional and community dynamics that affect many organisations working in restoration and conservation in Aotearoa. Others are more specifically related to the role of collectives and the institutional arrangements that govern and fund restoration. As discussed earlier, collectives are operating in a conservation environment that is increasingly fragmented and in need of investment in both capacity and resourcing (Norton et al. 2016, Brown 2018, Peters 2019). While collectives emerged in response to—and help to address—many of these challenges, they still encounter many systemic barriers to large-scale restoration (Norton et al. 2016, Doole 2020).

This research revealed four key areas in which collectives face challenges in both responding to restoration needs and in operating as collectives. These cover relational challenges, capability and capacity requirements, resourcing needs and social-ecological barriers to restoration. In the following subsections we explore each of these challenges by drawing on focus group and wānanga discussions as well as our reflections as researchers in the shared learning network. We present these challenges as areas where support could be targeted to better enable restoration collectives to achieve their goals and those of their communities.

## **Managing people and relationships**

At the heart of most restoration collectives are relationships. Collectives build and maintain relationships with diverse entities while also managing group and individual dynamics. This is one of the many strengths that collectives contribute to community-based restoration, but it is also an area which can pose challenges and require additional support. At a high level, restoration collectives need to manage numerous relationship dynamics to achieve collaboration and coordination across an area or goal. As one collective leader commented *“the other challenge is getting people to work together. It sounds simple, but it’s not easy, not when they’ve got differing values.”* This diversity in dynamics encompasses not just values or aims but also the age and stage of the organisations that collectives aim to support:

*The groups are all at different ages and stages and there’s different people coming in, so when you’re working together you’ve got groups that are just forming ideas or looking at the next project, versus groups that have been around for a while and are seeing the big picture and that we should all be working together. (Richard Kyte)*

Collective leaders also identified challenges in building relationships with institutions, funders and other partners. Relationship building can take substantial time and resources, which poses challenges for collectives operating with limited budgets and staff. As one collective leader said of their efforts to build awareness of their collective’s work: *“you have to front up and do all those meetings because nobody can sell what you do better than yourselves.”* This can sometimes present a negative feedback loop for collectives, whereby building relationships with business and philanthropists to gain




financial support is hampered by a lack of resourcing to support that engagement in the first place. Such capacity constraints are a particularly common barrier among iwi and hapū, who experience many demands on their time and resources. Hona Edwards commented on the need for Crown funders to *“have closer relationships with the on-the-ground kaitiaki rūpū, particularly in relation to the obligations for equity under Te Tiriti”* as well as to *“improve the devastation that some parts of our environment is currently exposed to.”*

Part of the challenge for restoration collectives in building relationships with diverse organisations is in communicating their specific role and contribution without taking away from the successes of the community entities they support. As Andrea Booth explained *“we need to be really careful not to take credit for the work our community groups are achieving.”* Another noted that they *“try to watch the language we use and then promote the impact we’re having through the community groups that we support.”*

A further area in which collectives must manage relationship dynamics is engagement with volunteers—both within the collective and those involved through community entities. Collective leaders are very aware of the need to not ask too much of volunteers and to empower volunteers to participate in ways that work for them. This can create some challenges for collectives specifically, in that many volunteers would rather undertake on-the-ground action rather than strategic activities like planning. Restoration collectives must therefore strike the right balance in restoration activities or dedicate more of these strategic functions to paid staff. Collectives also need to be





aware of the demands on volunteers and consider the potential for burnout. For many collective leaders, these challenges highlight the importance of funding for paid roles to support long-term and sustainable restoration. As one participant commented “we wanted a paid role because this work isn’t short term, [it’s] very long term and locally we wanted to set up an organisation that was going to last.”

Issues with burnout also affect those working for the collective as leaders, staff, board or committee members. The concentration of roles and responsibilities among a small number of people creates challenges around maintaining suitable workloads for those involved. For some collectives, these workload challenges also raise concerns about maintaining the long-term sustainability of the organisation and its ability to scale up their restoration activities. Many of the people central to restoration organisations are older retirees, adding to the need for succession planning and to maintain knowledge and expertise in the collective over the long term. Several collective leaders spoke of the challenge when organisational expertise becomes concentrated among one or several people, leaving the collective vulnerable if that person or people were to move on:

*Because we’re a 100-year vision, we don’t want it to just sit with one person, activating the communities and a range of different people is one of the best ways to ensure the project lives on and builds momentum, and that that momentum doesn’t have to go through the bottleneck of one individual.*

These concerns highlight the need for more long-term visions that support longevity and sustainability for both the collective and the organisations they support. This is especially important for landscape restoration goals that often span multiple generations and require interlinked social and ecological action.

## **Capability and capacity**

Restoration collectives draw on an extensive range of capabilities and capacities to meet the needs of diverse organisations and support restoration initiatives in highly variable contexts. This is one of the strengths that collectives bring to restoration that enable them to connect organisations, provide administrative and technical support and facilitate knowledge sharing.

However, many restoration collectives face challenges in building and maintaining the capacity to respond to wide-ranging social and ecological issues. This can include a lack of capacity at an organisational or board level and difficulties funding and retaining staff on a contractor basis. One collective leader described how one of the disadvantages of their organisational set up is that they cannot permanently employ people, meaning that when permanent employment opportunities come up elsewhere, staff are likely to leave. Constraints imposed by grant funding also present barriers to obtaining and mobilising resources in response to rapidly evolving project needs or opportunities.

Challenges in building and maintaining capacity also have an impact on the expertise and skills restoration collectives can draw on for their work. As one of collectives' key roles is to support smaller organisations, they need to be able to assist with complex regulatory requirements such as health and safety that are frequently updated and revised. Providing up-to-date advice and support is challenging as collectives are often not experts in these areas and must learn on the job. Consequently, member continuity and long-term knowledge retention are both critical to the work of collectives and a key risk to their success, particularly if there is high staff turnover and for collectives that rely heavily on volunteer contributions. To address this, one collective leader reported spending *"quite a lot of time making sure we keep our customer relations management up to date"* and that they are *"disciplined about keeping the institutional knowledge alive."*

Similarly, collective leaders noted that they face challenges in keeping up with the latest developments in conservation and restoration. Part of this challenge relates to the fast-paced nature of research and knowledge developments, as well as the complexity of issues being tackled. For instance, one collective leader asked:

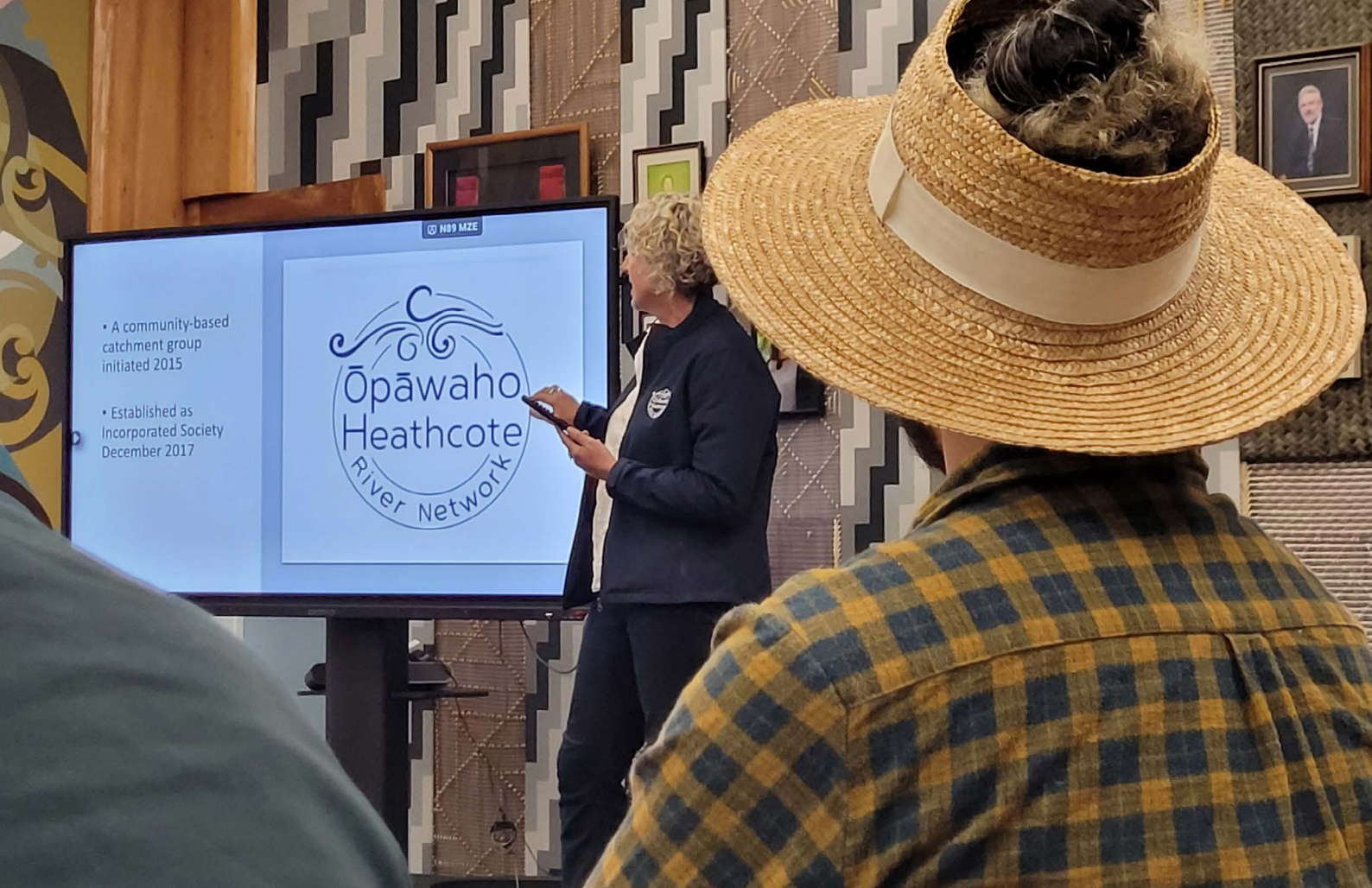
*How do we manage pests? What's the best traps? What's the best way to fund your group or should you be working at a catchment scale? I think [the knowledge] is constantly evolving. I guess it's a very new area so sometimes it can be hard to know what direction to take.*

Others commented that even shifts in the language of conservation, such as from biodiversity to bioprotection, placed demands on collectives that need to make an effort *"to bring everyone along with us"* (Pia Pohatu). Collective leaders expressed an interest in keeping up with research in the field, but that it was sometimes difficult to access such work or to know what was happening in the ecological and social sciences.

## Key support needs of collectives

- Government and funders to build closer relationships with collectives
- Government, as a Te Tiriti partner, to support and resource tangata whenua in exercising their desired kaitiaki role(s), including as part of restoration collectives
- Expert advice on legal and scientific aspects of restoration
- Increased recognition of the value of mātauranga Māori and local knowledge by government, funders and the wider public
- Training opportunities in project management, Te Tiriti and governance
- Researchers to publish their outputs and data open access and invest in plain language science communication for practitioner audiences
- Support to undertake long-term planning, succession planning and manage workloads across staff and volunteers
- Improved access to user-friendly and affordable project management tools, such as GIS and CRM platforms, information on funding sources and data storage






## Funding and resourcing

By far one of the most significant and ongoing challenges for restoration collectives is obtaining and maintaining sustainable resourcing. This was a recurrent theme across wānanga and focus group discussions as restoration collectives shared different aspects of their operations. One collective leader described funding as the “*number one challenge*” facing their organisation. A key contributor to this challenge is the wider conservation governance and funding context that creates the environment in which restoration collectives must seek, obtain and manage funding. Key features of this challenge include the lack of long-term funding pathways, lack of recognition of the role of collectives and issues surrounding Te Tiriti and equity.

In the first instance, there is a need for long-term funding options that enable restoration collectives to undertake ecologically effective restoration and facilitate long-term change. Currently, many collectives rely on short-term and fragmented funding sources which make it difficult to connect smaller projects and to work towards large-scale restoration. Grant funding is typically allocated for discrete, time-bound projects proposed in isolation from other initiatives, making it difficult to resource the long-term, multi-scalar planning required to catalyse holistic and landscape-scale action. As Esther Dijkstra commented:

*Continuity is the biggest thing where if you want to do something on a large scale and involve lots of people, planning is the first thing you need to do, and there's no funding for that whatsoever or it's very difficult to get funding for.*



Project-based funding similarly limits the ability for collectives to resource the collaboration and relationship building required for more interconnected long-term restoration. Chantez Connor-Kingi argued that longer funding periods are needed, suggesting ten years as a more realistic timeframe for *“working together on the same waka and understanding each other’s values.”* Another participant described how limits on the resources available to both them and their local iwi constrained their ability to undertake appropriate engagement on projects and plans. They commented that it’s *“not how we want to operate, but they’re extremely resource constrained.”* Long-term funding pathways would thus support not only more interconnected and ecologically effective restoration but also the relationship and community building that underpins these outcomes.

Existing funding models also impact the ability for collectives to maintain momentum and pose a risk to relationships with organisations and communities. Government funding is highly vulnerable to periods of political volatility in which funding streams become uncertain, subject to change or even cut. This can be due to changes in government or in the political-economic context, such as those created by COVID-19. This uncertainty limits the effectiveness of even large grants, as described by this participant:

*One of the biggest challenges is even when projects do get funding or they get a big rush of funding, for instance Jobs 4 Nature... you get a massive boost right at the beginning but it doesn’t have a long-term funding plan... how do you make sure that it’s consistent and meaningful, not patchy and stop and start?*

These dynamics can undermine momentum for projects and risk the reputation of the collective:

*It’s a real threat to the group’s credibility... you just get some momentum going, you show your community that you can achieve what you say you’re going to achieve, they buy into it ... People get really jaded really quickly from, ‘Here’s a great opportunity, let’s go’ to ‘No, it’s gone now’, ‘Oh, and it’s back again.’*

Hapū and iwi collectives stress that their work is on a lifetime scale, and that they need reliable resourcing so they can *“make sure our next rangatahi are encouraged in this kaupapa”* (Chantez Connor-Kingi).

Collective leaders also identified the lack of recognition for the specific role of restoration collectives as one of the barriers to accessing funding. The role of collectives as support and connectivity organisations means they primarily require funding for coordinator and administrator roles and related operational costs. Participants noted that this is not as attractive to funders as event or project-based activities such as planting trees or fencing waterways:

*Our model was difficult to fund because we’re not actually doing projects ourselves. Most organisations don’t want to fund keeping the lights on. They want to fund plants or fence posts, those tangible things. (Belinda Sleight)*





Yet being able to employ staff is seen as central to the efficacy and sustainability of restoration collectives. Being able to pay skilled people to undertake roles such as administration, facilitation and engagement is key to providing effective support for community entities and building longevity in restoration work. As one collective leader said *"things tend to fall over if it's not someone's job and they're not getting paid to do it."* Being able to resource staff positions enables collectives to get more out of the funding they do have and ensure more support for the organisations they work with.

Other participants noted that they have to be careful not to compete for funding with the community entities that they are supporting, placing further constraints on the limited funding options available to collectives. Funding is also expensive; the extensive requirements involved in applying for, managing and reporting on funding require significant time and resources from collectives. When combined with the uncertainty of accessing funding and the often small amounts that are on offer, obtaining grant funding becomes unsustainable for many community entities and some collectives. Several collectives reported that they no longer apply for small funds as they are cost-neutral at best, while others are shifting away from grant funding entirely. The scope of the work required in the restoration space is so large that there are ever-growing opportunities to expand operations and projects, meaning that *"with every success in funding we tend to grow our aspirations as well so we are always chasing growth in funding so we can do more."*

Some iwi and hapū collective leaders shared particular challenges around obtaining funding and the context in which they do so. For these collective leaders, it is essential that funding be understood in the context of Te Tiriti. Hona Edwards explained:

*We as tangata whenua have a whakapapa obligation to advocate for and to protect the environment. However we as a whole community have the same obligation for very different reasons, with the same common goal, a healthy environment for all into the future. Part of that "whole community" are the decision makers, the Government and its agencies, who are responsible for the decision making and including funding and resourcing. NKONWM along with other roopu kaitiaki, need to have funding and resourcing to continue to advocate, educate and participate in ensuring our common goal, te oranga o te pu taiao (the health of our environment) is continuously being focused on.*

Participants expressed frustration that the Crown had sanctioned the infrastructure development and land use changes that have degraded their waterways and other ecosystems, and now relied on tangata whenua and other communities to restore these environments through contestable funding. In many cases the land returned through Treaty settlements is highly degraded. For many iwi and hapū, this creates an obligation on the Crown to directly resource the long term restoration and management of these ecosystems. For iwi and hapū that have not completed a Treaty settlement, gaining access to funding is particularly difficult.

To address some of these challenges collective leaders often spoke of diversifying their funding options and building relationships with organisations and individuals that could support their fundraising efforts. Restoration collectives are exploring more flexible and long-term funding options such as business sponsorship or partnerships, memberships, eco-tourism ventures and contracting for services. However collectives also encounter barriers to achieving these pathways, such as the time-intensive nature of building relationships and internal capability to take up these opportunities. Others found that using fundraising or philanthropy services that connect organisations with possible funders requires an initial financial outlay that was prohibitive. For collectives that are already stretched across a number of roles with limited funding, being able to invest in these services may not be possible.

## Restoration context

Restoration collectives face a number of challenges relating to the context in which they are working to promote change and make a difference in their communities. From the wider ecological and social context of restoration to organisational scale challenges, collectives work in a complex environment that requires an agile and adaptive approach. Collective leaders frequently highlighted the scale and complexity of the restoration work needed across Aotearoa.

One of the key strengths of restoration collectives is their ability to bring together organisations and initiatives with a range of approaches and goals to coordinate landscape-scale restoration. However, collective leaders also spoke of the challenges this can pose – particularly in feeling that their work is having an impact when the scope of change required is vast. As Andrea Booth said:

*One of the things I've been concerned about for a long time is just making enough of a difference... I don't want to sound really grim or negative, but we really need to step things up significantly to get that significant environmental change, to slow that degradation.*

Other participants spoke of the complexity inherent in managing the rapidly evolving environmental and ecological challenges they are working with. It can be difficult to strategise as to what area to focus on when so many issues require attention: *"It's so hard to know sometimes where the funding should go exactly and where to focus, things are just changing all the time."*

Another factor that contributes to a dynamic and ever-changing environment for restoration is the legislative and political environment. Collective leaders often spoke of the challenges of keeping up with changing legislation and how the lack of consistency across government terms impacts their operations. This included investing in staffing to respond to certain programmes (e.g. freshwater management plans) but then having to reassess when a new government decreases the importance of these mechanisms. Collective leaders were concerned that shifting government funding and priorities



## Key support needs of collectives

- Government, funders and other NGOs to recognise and resource the specific role of collectives in connecting and catalysing restoration
- Long-term stable funding for restoration that covers operational and overhead costs
- Funding for paid coordinator and/or administrator roles
- Resource tangata whenua to exercise their kaitiaki role and engage in relationships
- Funding organisations to simplify the administration of funding (e.g. application and reporting requirements) and therefore reduce the associated costs
- Support navigating changing regulations and requirements (e.g. health and safety)
- Governments and funders to commit to long-term restoration objectives.

could impact the outcomes of their work, change their resourcing, undermine the importance of Te Tiriti partnership and impact their ability to follow through on their commitments to collaboration with partners. As Esther Dijkstra said:

*It would be very helpful if New Zealand would have a vision for the future, for the environment, that crosses all political parties, so that you know from one year to the other what's going to be the flavour of the political scene.*

Ultimately, restoration collectives have to be adept at managing and adapting to this shifting political environment, but it is important to recognise that this reduces their capacity to work towards their restoration aims.

At an organisational level, participants discussed the challenges collectives face in their role supporting and connecting other organisations, and the consequent difficulty in describing their contribution to social and environmental change. Specifically, collective leaders found that because their role as collectives was not always well understood by funders, decision-makers or the wider community they faced challenges in presenting the impact of their work. This is particularly challenging for collectives that operate primarily as hubs that support other entities as there is a lack of awareness of the value of this work:

*I may have helped [the organisation] with that funding application and some project management skills, but me saying that doesn't sound half as impressive as seeing those trees on the ground. So, for us as an organisation, the fact that the impacts are indirect often doesn't look very great for funding applications. (Belinda Sleight)*

Showing impact and demonstrating the value of their work was a common topic of discussion for collective leaders. Some participants noted that they were now compiling impact reports that aim to better evidence and communicate the support they provide.



# Section 4 | Insights on shared learning networks






The pilot network created space for collective leaders to connect, share knowledge and insights and reflect on their practices and work. As discussed earlier, collectives face a wide array of challenges in their work to support and amplify community-based restoration. The Network aimed to empower collective leaders to overcome these challenges by enabling them to connect with peers, discuss barriers to restoration and learn from others' approaches to overcoming these barriers. Such shared learning spaces are known to facilitate dynamic processes for both individual and collective learning (Ernst 2019). In the context of community-based restoration such learning can support collective efforts to respond to the complex and interconnected social and ecological aspects of landscape restoration (Keen and Mahanty 2005, Wyborn and Bixler 2013).

In this section we draw on focus group interviews and our observations of wānanga to discuss the value of the Network for collective leaders. We also share reflections on the structure and operations of the pilot network and conclude with lessons from the pilot for developing and sustaining shared learning networks.

## **The value of a shared learning network**

Te Taiao Collectives Network provided a valuable opportunity for collective leaders and our research team to explore how shared learning networks can support organisations working towards community-based restoration. As part of the research we aimed to design a network that incorporated different mechanisms to support shared learning and build relationships among participants. This included the initial co-design hui during which participants established connections and worked together to design and decide on the details of the Network. Collective leaders noted that this initial gathering helped to build rapport amongst the group (especially for those who attended in person) and made subsequent online gatherings more personable. The co-design process also enabled the generation of ideas and collective decision-making on the objectives for the pilot network, shared tikanga, and the norms, topics and activities for wānanga.

The online wānanga that followed were the main venue for collective leaders to meet regularly and share knowledge on topics identified through the co-design process. These wānanga were organised and facilitated by the research team. The format of wānanga varied but each involved presentations by collective leaders on the chosen topic, Q&A sessions and either external expert presentations, breakout group discussions or interactive activities. A range of approaches and activities were experimented with to identify options that worked well for the group. For example, early wānanga used the online interactive tool Miro, but subsequent wānanga used simpler features such as the Zoom whiteboard or informal small group discussions. Following each wānanga the research team prepared minutes for network members and a short summary report for wider distribution that covered the key insights and expertise shared. Video recordings of the wānanga were also available for network members to access. These outputs were intended to provide tangible resources for collective



leaders to use to support individual and organisational learning. Other resources available to network members included a WhatsApp group, a shared contact list and a group-sourced spreadsheet of funding opportunities. A final face-to-face wānanga was held in Whangārei after requests from members to hold another in-person gathering. This wānanga was hosted by one of the collectives and provided the opportunity for collective leaders to build stronger connections and to learn in place

Participants reported a number of benefits from participating in the Network including the ability to learn and share experiences with people working on similar issues, opportunities to connect and build relationships with others, reassurance and personal fulfilment from sharing experiences and the ability to reflect on their collective's practices and progress. This subsection summarises these benefits based on feedback from participants during focus group interviews.

### Shared learning

A key aim of the pilot network was to facilitate opportunities to share knowledge and experiences between restoration collectives working on diverse but related projects in different parts of the country. This aim was reinforced through the co-design process where collectives identified their desire to 'connect, share knowledge and learn, to support their local restoration work' as one of the network objectives. Shared or collaborative learning is an iterative process that is "*embedded in a web of complex and evolving social relationships and structures*" (Keen and Mahanty 2005: 105). Incorporating co-design into the research was a deliberate choice to encourage shared ownership of the pilot network and the learning process. As researchers we aimed to facilitate the connections and relationship building that would enable collective leaders to share knowledge and build collective insights from across their various fields (Keen and Mahanty 2005, Ernst 2019). Participants noted that the Network created a trusting environment that contributed to the success of the initiative.

The pilot network was largely successful in creating space for participants to learn from each other and develop knowledge and ideas across a diverse range of topics and applications. Focus group participants described a range of positive experiences related to shared learning. One collective leader noted the "*wide diversity of skills, knowledge, experiences and activities*" that were shared through the Network, concluding "*I've just learned so much... when you really need it you can draw on it and that's something that's of huge value.*" Another highlighted that some leaders can gain particular benefit from such opportunities:

*I'm quite young and I'm quite early in my career, so I think having the opportunity to hear from amazing people that are so experienced and have a lot of knowledge... it's definitely been interesting for me to learn more about all sorts of things that are happening up and down the country because so much of my experience is just to do with [my collective].*






Online and in-person wānanga were the main arenas for shared learning in the pilot. Network members also described how they were able to draw on the outputs, connections and relationships developed through the Network to extend this knowledge sharing beyond the wānanga. Some participants shared that they were able to put this new knowledge into practice as they navigated their day to day work. For example, Andrea Booth commented:

*We work in an area of complexity and uncertainty, so when you're out there in [the field], you can remember a gem from somebody else and think, 'Oh, this is how I might be able to deal with this situation'.*

Others described how sharing the challenges and hurdles faced by different collectives gave them confidence that these were not only “a normal part of the process” but that there were “different processes that people go through” in responding to these challenges.

### **Social connectivity**

Beyond shared learning, the Network played an important role in facilitating relationships and connections among people and organisations working together towards similar goals. The Network used a combination of in-person and online gatherings to establish a foundation for connections between collective representatives. Participants reported the importance of the Network for bringing together people with “shared interests and shared opportunities” (Belinda Sleight) and



simply the opportunity to meet socially with other like-minded people. Meeting face-to-face, especially for the first co-design hui, was an important component for many participants. For the collective leaders involved, the Network provided a chance to expand their professional and personal connections across a range of organisations and across the country. As one participant reported, *"we were not connecting with anyone at all, and now we have connected with people across the country and across a range of types of groups."*

These connections provided real benefits to participants who found that they were then able to develop these relationships for ongoing support and to think through challenges and opportunities alongside each other rather than on their own:

*I found that super valuable just to connect with people and be able to pick up the phone and just call people up when I had questions that I wouldn't have otherwise been able to get answers for.*

The diversity of locations, approaches and backgrounds represented in the Network significantly expanded leaders' connections and provided a broad base for people to offer or seek help and expertise within the group.

### **Personal fulfilment**

Alongside building social and professional connections, participants reported that the Network helped to provide holistic support for them in their work and as individuals. For some collective leaders the Network fostered ideas and inspiration for improving te taiao and working for their communities. As one participant described *"I've had a collision of ideas from everyone and it's just wonderful... I just get absolutely inspired."* Belinda Sleight commented:

*I don't remember the specifics of the presentation, but I remember the way it made me feel, and that was excitement, because it was relevant to conversations that we're having here.*

This inspiration and energy helped leaders to build motivation for their work, while also creating connections with others in the face of shared challenges

Similarly, these connections supported collective leaders at a personal level. Being part of a network with others who experience similar challenges created a feeling of solidarity and reduced feelings of isolation for some participants. One collective leader described this as *"peer support"* while Esther Dijkstra commented that for her and another representative from her collective it gave them the *"confidence that we weren't fighting the fire ourselves and that other people around the country were grappling with similar issues."*

Overall, the opportunity to participate in a shared learning network supported collective leaders to feel more fulfilled, hopeful and supported in their work while also providing opportunities for personal development and learning. For example, wānanga on topics such as innovative tools for landscape restoration or funding opportunities enabled



individuals to learn about new approaches or gain ideas from other participants to explore in more detail. The value of coming together and sharing with others was strongly emphasised by collectives and clearly provided positive benefits to those who were able to participate. As one collective leader commented *"It definitely helps lift the spirits,"* another described how they *"really enjoyed it so much, I sat there and my cup was absolutely filled to the brim."*

## Reflection and validation

The format of network wānanga, which included a mix of Q&A and breakout group discussions, provided space for participants to discuss different aspects of their work. Some collective leaders observed that sharing knowledge and experiences with other collectives provided opportunities for them to reflect on their own practices and approaches. For some this included being able to pick up *"fresh ideas"* or recognising their own expertise in offering ideas to others. Collective leaders commented that sharing their experiences provided an opportunity to reflect on their progress and how far they had come in their own organisation. This also created space to think through future options and next steps. As one collective leader said: *"We were able to offer a lot, but we got a lot from that in terms of thinking about what else we might explore."*

The wānanga also helped to create space for reflection that validated the approaches and work underway in collectives. As one participant said *"probably one of the biggest benefits of being part of Te Taiao Collective has been the fact that it's validated a lot of the work that we've been doing."* This participant commented that sharing experiences and knowledge with others had given them the *"confidence that actually we are making a difference in our rohe, we are making a difference with the mahi that we're doing."* Another noted that hearing about similar experiences across organisations working in different restoration contexts had been helpful and encouraged them to seek connections across a wider community in the sector.

For some collective leaders, the interest other participants showed in their work also helped to validate their approach and strengthen their confidence. Towards the end of the pilot some collectives were connecting outside of wānanga and sharing specific approaches or tools to help each other to strengthen their taiao work.

Enabling collective leaders to collectively and individually reflect on progress and approaches thus helped to build connection among network members and create opportunities for further learning. Developing recognition of collectives' common experiences alongside their diversity was a key benefit for participants who develop a deeper understanding of their own situation and practices. As Chantez Connor-Kingi commented:

*The wānanga that we've been having through this journey have been awesome because you get to see what other people are working with... we actually learn lots from each other and it gives us some peace of mind that we are doing good. If no one's telling us that, we can see it ourselves within our own projects and within other people's projects.*



## Developing a shared learning network

Previous research on shared learning and environmental networks has revealed a range of social, structural and material factors that influence how successful networks are at promoting connectivity and learning (Keen and Mahanty 2005, Ernst 2019, Newig et al. 2019). Social factors like the size and composition of networks are often identified as important determinants of building familiarity and trust, and therefore participants' willingness to share their knowledge and experiences. The format of network interactions, such as types of knowledge-sharing activities and structure of participation, also shape what information is shared and whether and how participants learn from one another. Together with considerations like meeting frequency, length, timing, location and technology used, these factors shape leaders' ability to participate in network activities and the benefits they experience. Over time, small decisions about the design of a shared learning network can have significant effects on network participation and outcomes.

This pilot network was developed with explicit consideration of the factors that could shape how collective leaders connect with and learn from one another. We used a survey and co-design hui to solicit participants' input on the Network's objectives and how wānanga could be designed to be of greatest benefit to them (see [Methodology section](#)). We later made two significant changes to the Network based on participants' requests:

1. making video recordings for participants after wānanga; and
2. making one of the online wānanga an in-person hui.


We also experimented with a variety of knowledge-sharing activities and formats over the course of the pilot, to explore what approaches and technologies worked best. For example some wānanga featured speakers from within the Network, while others included external experts; some featured large group Q&A sessions while others used breakout groups.

This section reflects on these design choices, based on researcher observations of the wānanga and feedback received through focus group interviews. Thematic analysis identified four key aspects that participants thought were important for shared learning, but for which they held different or sometimes uncertain preferences. These differing views are summarised alongside explanations of our earlier thinking to elaborate considerations for developing a network or collective of community environmental leaders.

### Membership diversity

In designing the pilot network, we deliberately sought to include as wide a variety of collectives as possible, including diversity in regions, collective age, urban/rural settings, environmental focus, membership and leadership. We reasoned that what collectives have in common is their role in connecting and supporting multiple community initiatives to improve environmental outcomes at large scales. Given that





this is a relatively new way of working in Aotearoa, and that many collective leaders in an earlier survey reported feeling isolated (McFarlane et al. 2021), we hypothesised that collectives would benefit from learning from others who play a similar role in a diverse range of social, ecological and institutional contexts.

However, participants held differing views on how much diversity in member collectives is desirable, as well as what types of diversity are important. Some participants reported that they benefited from the variety of collectives in the Network and the diverse perspectives shared on topics, with Belinda Sleight noting that *"there is strength in diversity."* As Esther Dijkstra explained, this diversity was useful because it mirrored the holistic approach and variety of entities in their collective:

*Whether you are working in predator control or weed control or doing things around water, it's all Te Taiao, all interlinked. And I find it very interesting to hear from all these different angles... because that's how we work with our network as well. ... we are just a bunch of people that want to work together ... [for] large landscape improvement.*

Other participants reported that while the diversity of collectives *"can add value to the conversations because people are coming at things from different perspectives, it can also make it really hard to see how that might relate to what you are doing."* For example, participants highlighted that ideas about novel funding approaches were hard to translate between collectives with different institutional arrangements (such as iwi trusts compared with biodiversity forums) and operating models. As a result, *"you can be sitting there feeling like it's not all that relevant to you because you're trying to accommodate everyone."* Several participants thought that it could be valuable to create opportunities for more similar collectives to connect and share insights that are specific to their work (for example, plant selection).

Participants also reflected that even collectives of a similar type can vary in ways that mean insights are not directly transferable. One recalled being surprised by the variety of experiences and knowledge among predator-free groups due to differences in how long they had been operating and their funding. Another agreed, noting that *"if you've been in the game for quite a while, your set of issues that you're dealing with are quite different to somebody who's just starting out. Then again, they can probably learn a lot from your experiences."* Different collectives may thus experience different types of benefits from shared learning networks, with newer groups potentially benefiting most from new knowledge and ideas, while more established groups benefit from the opportunity for reflection and validation.

Participants' reflections indicate that membership diversity can both promote and limit shared learning, depending on the nature of insights being shared. Forums for sharing common challenges, strategies and experiences in community-based restoration will likely benefit from broad membership, whereas sharing of knowledge and tools for specific restoration activities may work best among more similar groups.



### Types of knowledge sharing


Wānanga were designed to allow participants to define what knowledge they shared; topics and presenters were identified through the co-design survey, and presenters were given some questions or suggestions on aspects they might cover. Most presenters shared an overview of their collective, their approaches to or experiences of the topic and what they have learned. Presentations were followed by discussions or interactive exercises to enable wider knowledge sharing among the group.

Participants found the use of topics to organise knowledge sharing in wānanga to be valuable:

*I really, really enjoyed those targeted sessions where there was a theme, and you chose specific people who you knew could really contribute to those themes and they had quite targeted presentations. (Andrea Booth)*

As several participants commented, “every wānanga had a different topic”, which “made it quite specific - people could sort of focus on that particular issue” (Esther Dijkstra) while also ensuring that a variety of topics were covered across the wānanga series. They also appreciated “how you got us all together and got us to identify the things that interest us, rather than telling us what we were going to talk about” as this kept wānanga relevant to collectives’ work.

Participants stressed the importance of keeping the presentations and knowledge sharing “at the right level,” but held different perspectives on what level of knowledge



sharing was most useful. Several commented that they were most interested in learning about the 'overarching' role of collectives operating at a regional or landscape scale, as that is where they are looking for new ideas and approaches. For example:

*We're all experienced in environmental restoration... We don't want to talk about the detail, we want to get into the real topics – what do we need to talk about – to the game-changing things, the things that can really help us to leverage and do more and get over the barriers. (Andrea Booth)*

Others sought more detailed information so that they could assess its relevance and apply it to advance restoration in their own context:

*I think a lot of the sharing was at quite a high level... and because our situations are all quite unique, sometimes the information wasn't specific enough... It sort of often felt more networking and sharing experiences rather than actually growing a knowledge base.*

Participants sought applicable knowledge across a range of areas, including funding, data management software, monitoring and strategies for volunteer engagement. However, they acknowledged that collectives' approaches are often very specific to their organisation and context, which can make it difficult to identify the most relevant and applicable insights:

*There's a lot of fundraising that's quite regionally specific in terms of private trusts and the councils tend to fund things really differently depending on their priorities, so it's hard to talk about sharing fundraising opportunities.*

A participant reflected that as presentations would necessarily vary in their relevance to different collectives, and the important thing is "maintain[ing] this engagement, sustaining active participation, keeping those discussions lively... they're all part of balancing out the expertise and the inclusivity of the group." They suggested that one way to promote shared benefits is to stay focused on what participants have in common, "that learned experience of being collectively engaged." Several participants thought that one way to keep the knowledge sharing focused and useful could be to workshop problems together:

*For the [network] together to figure out what the big things, the barriers and opportunities... that we can address together [with] those brains in the room. We don't necessarily know what... they will be into the future, so a collaboration in order to move groups forward and achieve more for environmental restoration. (Andrea Booth)*

### **Size of the network**

The pilot network involved 15 collectives, with an option for more than one person to participate from each collective. As only a few collectives took up this opportunity, wānanga typically involved between 15 and 20 participants.



In the focus group we polled participants about what they thought the upper limit should be for the number of organisations involved in a future network. The mean limit suggested was 16 organisations, though responses varied from five to 'no limit'. This suggests that the pilot network was approximately the right size for the majority of participants, which is further borne out by the high levels of participation across all six wānanga.


Several participants suggested fewer than 10 organisations would be ideal, while another reflected that *"in my experience the bigger the group the more challenging the prospect to get real gains... I would not want this [network] to be any more than it is."* Participants argued that a larger number of collectives would diminish the social connections that facilitate shared learning. They highlighted the importance of familiarity and trust for both knowledge sharing and for the personal fulfilment that collective leaders gain from participation. A larger number of collectives would also prevent the inclusion of member updates/whakawhanaungatanga at the beginning of wānanga, and make it difficult to enable broad participation in Q&A. One collective leader commented that *"I think everyone was really aware of not speaking too much and giving everybody a chance or not delving into the nitty gritty because there were time pressures."*

However, at the other end of the spectrum, some participants did not think there should be a limit on the number of organisations, and that it should be open to *"as many as fit the criteria, goals, and values of the network."* Reasons suggested for increasing network size included increasing both the breadth of ideas and experience shared, and the number of collectives that would benefit from shared learning. As one collective leader put it *"in terms of sharing ideas, it would be good if any relevant group could participate in that."* Several participants mentioned other collectives that would have benefited from being part of the Network. One participant also highlighted that a larger number of collectives could enable the inclusion of more similar collectives.

Several collective leaders suggested that a nested structure or greater use of breakout groups could enable a network to accommodate a larger number of organisations without limiting opportunities for social connectivity. For example, one participant commented:

*I don't think there should be a limit. Different organisation approaches can accommodate larger numbers, for example a subgroup type structure. Whatever the number, it needs the people resourcing to run it.*

Finally, collective leaders who attended wānanga alongside a colleague from their collective commented that this helped to enhance their learning experience. For example Esther Dijkstra said, *"we felt that it was quite beneficial because we could then afterwards bounce ideas off of things that we heard and that we could potentially implement."* Comments like these underscore the fundamentally social



nature of social learning, and that learning does not just happen in the moment of knowledge acquisition but through processes of repetition, reflection and interpretation.

### **Sustaining connection**

During the pilot network we trialled several approaches to sustaining connection and building relationships beyond the wānanga. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of in-person gatherings to facilitate strong connections and enduring relationships. However, it is not always possible to organise or fund numerous in-person gatherings. As such, shared learning networks need to use a range of different approaches and tools to foster meaningful connections and ultimately build a sustainable long term network.

Generally, collective leaders acknowledged that building relationships and connections outside of the Network organically can be challenging. There can be a range of reasons and motivations for individuals to participate in a network like the pilot. Some are motivated by a desire to make connections and build ongoing relationships with people working in related fields. Others expressed interest in being part of the wānanga and shared learning environment but did not have much capacity to build connections outside of these gatherings.

The central focus for building connections between collective leaders in this network was the bimonthly online wānanga held over Zoom. For some participants, this form of engagement was ideal and they were not looking to participate in more activities in between. For others however, the gap between wānanga means that the Network could fall into the background and be forgotten in *"the daily grind."* One collective leader suggested that adding opportunities for members to stay connected to topics and potential areas to build capacity in between wānanga could help maintain momentum while also strengthening social learning within wānanga.

These dynamics will inevitably be shaped by the participants involved in any particular network and their motivations, resources and constraints. As one participant noted, *"people who participate in networks like this have to be prepared to share."* Another commented that *"it's just up to us as individuals or as groups to pursue those relationships or those connections."* Tools that collective leaders found useful for connecting in between wānanga included a shared spreadsheet on funding opportunities which members contributed to, and a network email list which was used to share information about events and opportunities.

We observed increases in person-to-person connections emerging outside of wānanga towards the end of the pilot network. Members built on the relationships they had formed in wānanga to connect with others to share information on specific topics, techniques or governance situations. In several cases, collective leaders from different regions followed up with each other to seek further insight on how a leader has dealt with a similar issue to theirs in a different context. Collective leaders also mentioned the



value of being able to share this knowledge with others outside of the Network, such as local government or other organisations. As Chantez Connor-Kingi said *"sharing is great ... you don't want to be reinventing the wheel if something else is already done and it's doing good."*

One avenue that we experimented with to enable relationship building and knowledge sharing outside of the wānanga was social media. In this case, we found this was not a successful tool for encouraging meaningful connection. A WhatsApp group was established based on discussions with the Network about possible platforms for post-wānanga communication but this never gained momentum and was only used by the researchers to share notices. In the focus groups, some members said they were not even aware of the WhatsApp group and noted that the email list was enough for them to stay connected. Others commented that social media groups on WhatsApp or Facebook can become intrusive:

*There's not enough limitation of scope as to what it's for...and also, I think people are just so busy ... I know for a lot of people, WhatsApp can be a work platform, but it can also be a social family life platform.*

Esther Dijkstra described this as *"digital overload."* These reflections, alongside the overwhelming feedback on the importance of in-person gatherings, suggest that social media may not be ideal for sustaining connections for shared learning. While there are opportunities to use these technologies to share information, they may not be suitable for building relationships in a sustainable manner.





## Lessons for future shared learning networks and forums

Reflecting on our and the participants' experiences of Te Taiao Collectives Network, we identified a number of lessons on organising and facilitating shared learning networks. These lessons may be useful to inform the development or refinement of other networks or forums that aim to encourage social learning among community environmental leaders.

### Establishing a network

Our experience establishing the pilot network underscored the importance of investing adequate resourcing into the organisation and facilitation of a network. The pilot was resourced through a time-bound research grant. To achieve long-term sustainability, the Network now needs to obtain further funding or in-kind support to enable it to function as an ongoing forum for connecting and sharing learning. Funding is crucial to be able to provide trained facilitation, something that was identified by participants as central to the smooth functioning of the Network. Funding is also required to finance travel to in-person collaboration and meetings, which is especially important for enabling co-design of a network with and for restoration leaders. The ability to meet face-to-face was highlighted by participants as critical for building relationships and strengthening the Network.

#### Key lessons for establishing a network:

- » Shared learning networks require adequate and sustainable resourcing.
- » Sustainable networks require a paid coordinator or facilitator.
- » It is important to incorporate in-person gathering opportunities, especially early in the process.
- » Co-design processes strengthen the design of shared learning networks and promote greater buy-in by participants. This includes co-designing the format of gatherings and topics for discussion, and building in feedback mechanisms.
- » Keeping networks/forums to less than 20 organisations enables relationship building between participants, and thus more interactive and sustained social learning.
- » It can be beneficial to have more than one person attend from an organisation, as this creates opportunities to strengthen learning and reduces the workload on individuals to share insights with the wider organisation.

## Running a network:

The pilot network ran for two years and included two in-person gatherings and five online wānanga, as well as an initial co-design hui and follow up wānanga to provide feedback on research findings. Drawing on our own experiences as researchers and the reflections of participants, we identified a number of practices which helped to organise and facilitate online and in-person wānanga. These lessons highlight the importance of clear organisation of gatherings that includes a mix of structured and unstructured discussion. Participants found benefits in creating space for different types of interaction such as breakout groups and more free space to chat and build relationships.

### Key lessons for running a network:

- » Providing facilitation guidelines helps to establish a group culture and norms for participating in network gatherings.
- » It is important to choose discussion topics and themes that are relevant to the knowledge needs of network members.
- » Featuring experts from within the network aids in building social learning capacity as well as strengthening relationships.
- » Working with network presenters ahead of time can help to create cohesive discussions and activities.
- » Using breakout groups, especially where those groups feature similar organisations, can help to build trust and enable sharing of details specific to different types of organisations.
- » Interactive exercises are useful for building discussion. These may not work for everyone and there can be technology issues so it helps to have a back-up plan.
- » Ensure people have time to gather their thoughts before asking for in-depth discussion.
- » Provide time and space for people to connect, share and update others in the network to help build stronger relationships.
- » Respect people's time by overloading the schedule for the gathering and ensure facilitation is kept to time.
- » Aim to video record presentations (with consent) and share them to allow wider knowledge sharing.



## Additional aspects for successful networks

Beyond establishing a shared learning network and running gatherings we identified other aspects that helped to build capacity, share knowledge and foster relationships in the pilot network.

### Other key lessons:

- » It is not possible to make everyone happy all the time and this will inevitably mean some trade-offs in the content and structure of gatherings. For example, a focus on technical aspects of restoration may be useful for some people, while others may wish to talk about broader challenges and opportunities that are relevant across a range of contexts.
- » It is useful to have an easily accessible online location for sharing files and resources.
- » It can be difficult to identify appropriate mechanisms for sharing information and updates. It will take trial and error to find which methods work the best with the specific individuals and organisations involved in the network.
- » Producing high level summaries of topics and discussions is appreciated. It can be especially useful if these resources are in clear language and include visual elements such as diagrams.







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