



PROTECTING NATURE TOGETHER

WWF-NEW ZEALAND
CONSERVATION IMPACT REPORT
2026



**“Nature needs
strong voices now
more than ever”**



WELCOME

This year, we've been celebrating a significant milestone for WWF-New Zealand: 50 years of standing up for nature in Aotearoa.

For five decades, WWF-New Zealand has worked alongside supporters, communities, iwi and hapū, scientists, businesses and decision-makers to protect the species and places that make this country so special. Together, we have helped restore ecosystems, protect endangered wildlife, strengthen environmental protections, and support conservation efforts across Aotearoa New Zealand.

These achievements belong to many people. They belong to the generations of supporters who have stood with us, the conservationists who have dedicated their lives to protecting nature, the communities taking action in their own backyards, and the partners who have helped turn ambition into action.

This anniversary year has not only given us an opportunity to reflect on and celebrate these achievements, but it has also been a year of significant activity and progress.

We worked closely with Ngāti Kuri to advance tikanga-led approaches to marine protection, and supported groundbreaking research on the remote Antipodes Islands to better understand threats facing one of the world's most endangered seabirds.

We also continued advocating for stronger ocean protection and mobilised thousands of New Zealanders on campaigns for action on bottom trawling, more cameras on boats, and stronger marine mammal sanctuaries. We partnered with the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust and helped secure stronger protections for hoiho, and we supported communities across the country to protect and restore nature on the ground.

This year, WWF-New Zealand launched a new ten-year strategy focused on four areas where we believe we can make the greatest difference: looking after our ocean, improving the outlook for threatened species and ecosystems, elevating nature and climate together, and amplifying Treaty-consistent and Indigenous-led conservation.

The coming years will be critical. With a General Election on the horizon, important decisions lie ahead about ocean protection, climate action, conservation and the future of our environment – all of which stand at a critical juncture. Nature needs strong voices now more than ever.

But we're optimistic – because time and again, we have seen what can be achieved when people come together around a shared vision for nature. The stories in this report show how your continued support is helping protect wildlife, strengthen communities, advance science and advocate for a healthier future for people and nature.

As we celebrate our first 50 years, we are also looking ahead to the next chapter. The choices we make today will shape the future of nature in Aotearoa for generations to come.

Thank you for being part of this journey and for standing with us as we continue working towards a future where people and nature thrive together.



Dr Kayla Kingdon-Bebb
Chief Executive, WWF-New



Hon. James Shaw
Board Chair, WWF-New Zealand



INTRODUCTION

Nature is part of who we are as New Zealanders. It supports our wellbeing, underpins our economy and helps us build resilience to climate change.

But our natural world is facing growing pressures. More than 4,000 of our native species are at risk of extinction, while our ocean faces threats from habitat destruction, overfishing, pollution and climate change. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, impacting communities, ecosystems and wildlife across the country.

For 50 years, WWF-New Zealand has worked alongside supporters, partners, communities, iwi and hapū to advocate for stronger environmental protections, support conservation action on the ground, champion Indigenous leadership, and drive solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing nature.

The stories in this report show how your support has made a difference over the past year and contributed to a future where people and nature thrive together.

How we work

WWF-New Zealand is part of the WWF International Network, the world's largest independent conservation organisation.

Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and build a future where people live in harmony with nature.

We know that no single organisation can solve the environmental challenges facing our world alone. Lasting change requires collaboration, partnership and collective action.

We bring together communities, iwi and hapū, scientists, businesses, governments and supporters to develop and deliver solutions that protect and restore nature.

We advocate for stronger environmental policies, support community-led conservation initiatives, invest in science and research, and work to inspire and mobilise people to take action for nature.

A photograph of two albatrosses in a grassy field. The bird in the foreground is looking towards the right, with its beak slightly open. The bird behind it is also looking right. The background is a soft-focus field of tall grass.

OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS

This year, WWF-New Zealand launched Nature Forever, For Everyone – our 10-year strategy that will guide our work through to 2035.

Nature in Aotearoa New Zealand is facing significant challenges, and we know we cannot do everything. After careful consideration, we identified four areas where we believe we can make the greatest difference over the next decade.

Looking after our ocean

Aotearoa New Zealand is one of the world's great ocean nations, yet less than one percent of our marine environment is highly protected. Over the next decade, we will continue working to expand high-quality, Treaty-consistent marine protection, improve fisheries management, and reduce threats to marine life both here and across the Pacific and Southern Ocean.

Improving the outlook for threatened species and ecosystems

Aotearoa New Zealand's biodiversity is extraordinary, yet we have one of the highest proportions of threatened species in the world. WWF-New Zealand will continue supporting ecosystem restoration, advocating for strong environmental policies, and tackling the causes of species decline with the goal of improving the outlook for hundreds of threatened species and ecosystems.

Elevating nature and climate together

Nature, climate and the economy are deeply interconnected. Healthy ecosystems help store carbon, protect communities from extreme weather, support biodiversity, and underpin long-term economic prosperity. Yet nature is too often treated as separate from climate action, finance and public policy.

We will continue our work to ensure that businesses, financial institutions and governments recognise the value of nature and act on it. This includes advancing nature-based solutions to climate change and helping build a nature-positive economy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Amplifying Treaty-consistent and Indigenous-led conservation

Conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand cannot succeed without honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supporting tangata whenua leadership. WWF-New Zealand will continue strengthening partnerships with iwi, hapū, Māori and Pacific communities, and supporting Indigenous-led approaches to protecting and restoring te taiao.

The next decade will be critical for nature. The Global Biodiversity Framework has set a pathway to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030, and WWF organisations around the world are aligning their work to help make that happen.

The stories in this report show how we are already putting that strategy into action.

SNAPSHOT OF THE LAST YEAR

Celebrating 50 years of WWF-New Zealand

Over the last year, we've been marking an extraordinary milestone for WWF-New Zealand: 50 years of standing up for nature in Aotearoa.

Over the past five decades, WWF-New Zealand has been part of some of the most important conservation efforts in this country.

These include helping establish Tiritiri Matangi Island Sanctuary, supporting predator-eradication on offshore islands, protecting endangered hoiho habitat, advocating for cameras on boats and stronger protections for seabirds, and funding hundreds of grassroots conservation projects across Aotearoa. These achievements belong to every person who has stood up for nature alongside us.

It's been wonderful to celebrate this milestone with everyone who has made our work possible. A particular highlight was a special celebration hosted by the Governor-General at Government House in Auckland, where supporters, partners, staff and friends gathered to celebrate all we've achieved over the last five decades.

During the celebration, we launched our WWF-New Zealand Nature Forever Impact Fund – a permanent impact fund to support our work for generations to come and provide WWF-New Zealand with a secure, long-term income stream. This will help ensure we can continue delivering the bold action needed to protect and restore nature.

Over the year, we also held a [supporter webinar](#) to reflect on five decades of conservation impact and share our vision for the future, and partnered with the NZ Symphony Orchestra's National Youth Orchestra to celebrate our anniversary through two ocean-themed concerts in Wellington and Auckland.

While our anniversary has offered an opportunity to reflect on how far we've come, it has also reinforced how much work remains ahead. After fifty years, our mission remains as urgent as ever.

Reimagining a future for marine protection

Aotearoa New Zealand's ocean is home to extraordinary biodiversity, yet less than one per cent is highly protected and marine species and habitats remain under immense pressure.

WWF-New Zealand is working alongside iwi, hapū, scientists, industry, communities, and decision-makers to help build a new vision for marine protection – one that reflects both the ecological needs of our ocean and the aspirations of tangata whenua.

A major focus has been our ongoing partnership with Ngāti Kuri to advance new approaches to improve ocean health, including reimagining new marine protection legislation that recognises iwi and hapū leadership and tikanga-led tools. This work challenges outdated conservation models and explores how marine protection can better reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi, mātauranga Māori, and customary stewardship.

A particular highlight was the *Taiātea: Gathering of the Oceans Voices, Views and Leadership Symposium*, which brought together Indigenous leaders from across

the Pacific and beyond for a wānanga at Waitangi focused on protecting and restoring Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa. This highlighted the leadership Pacific Island nations are showing in ocean protection and the opportunity for Aotearoa to play a stronger role in caring for our shared Blue Pacific.

This year we also developed our Oceans Blueprint, setting out practical solutions to restore ocean health and provide a roadmap for future governments. We have continued to engage with political parties on our detailed policy recommendations for new marine protection legislation to help ensure this work is a priority for the next government.

Together, our work is helping to lay the foundations for a new generation of marine protection that reflects science and indigenous knowledge and ensures our ocean can thrive into the future.

Standing up for our ocean

Alongside developing long-term solutions for our ocean, WWF-New Zealand continued advocating for stronger protections for marine wildlife and habitats.

We called for a review of New Zealand's [marine mammal sanctuaries](#) after hundreds of marine mammals were killed within sanctuary boundaries, shone a spotlight on the Government's approach to [reporting marine protection progress](#), and [challenged Seafood New Zealand's](#) misleading claims about marine protection and the sustainability of bottom trawling.

We also released [new public polling](#) showing strong public support for action to protect the ocean, including restrictions on bottom trawling and the creation of more marine protected areas. The findings helped elevate ocean issues in the national conversation, with both the Prime Minister and the Oceans and Fisheries Minister questioned by the media about bottom trawling.

Public support for ocean protection continued to grow. More than 30,000 people have now signed WWF-New Zealand's [petition](#) calling for 30 per cent of Aotearoa New Zealand's ocean to be protected by 2030, while over the last year more than 7,000 new signatures were added to our [Cameras on Boats petition](#) and a further 4,000 people backed our continued call for stronger action on [bottom trawling](#). With your help, we are continuing to keep the pressure on.

The year also saw significant progress for marine protection around the country. New marine reserves along the Otago and South Canterbury coast [finally became reality](#) after years of advocacy and effort, and new protections in the Hauraki Gulf came into force, safeguarding important habitats and marine species.

These achievements show that progress is possible. But they are only the beginning. WWF-New Zealand will continue advocating for a new wave of marine protection that restores ocean health and biodiversity for future generations.



Supporting groundbreaking research on the edge of the world

Far to the south-east of mainland New Zealand lie the remote Antipodes Islands, home to one of the world's most remarkable and threatened seabirds.

This year, WWF-New Zealand helped fund critical research to better understand the movements of the Antipodean albatross and its interactions with commercial fishing vessels across the Pacific Ocean.

Researchers travelled to one of the most isolated locations on Earth to deploy cutting-edge tracking devices and gather new data on how these birds use the ocean. The research is helping build a clearer picture of where and when albatrosses are most at risk from fishing activity.

The findings will contribute to efforts to reduce seabird bycatch, one of the greatest threats facing many seabird species globally.

Alongside supporting the research itself, WWF-New Zealand worked to bring [this story](#) to the public through compelling [storytelling](#) and [media coverage](#) - helping people connect with a species few New Zealanders will ever see, but whose future depends on action taken today.

By combining science, storytelling, and advocacy, we can help ensure these iconic birds continue to soar above the Southern Ocean for generations to come.



Standing up for one of the world's rarest penguins

The hoiho, or yellow-eyed penguin, is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most iconic and endangered species. With fewer than 150 breeding pairs remaining on the mainland, urgent action is needed to reverse the species' decline.

WWF-New Zealand has partnered with the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Trust to call for stronger protections for hoiho at sea.

Together, we mobilised supporters to contact Ministers and MPs and demand action to address threats facing the species, including fisheries interactions, habitat degradation, and climate-related pressures. Thousands of people used our email tool to add their voices to calls for greater protection and more Marine Protected Areas.

The campaign has highlighted growing concern about the future of hoiho and the urgent need for stronger action. Following media advocacy, political engagement and public campaigning from WWF and others, the Government introduced temporary fishing restrictions to protect hoiho and has since made these protections permanent – a major victory for this treasured species.

Ensuring future generations of New Zealanders can encounter hoiho in the wild, rather than only on our five-dollar note, will require sustained commitment from government, communities, scientists, and conservation organisations. WWF-New Zealand remains committed to helping secure a future where this priceless species can recover and thrive.

Supporting communities on the ground

For more than two decades, WWF-New Zealand's Community Conservation Fund, supported by the Tindall Foundation, has helped local communities protect and restore nature across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The fund began as the Habitat Protection Fund in 1999. Many of the early grants helped catalyse conservation and community initiatives across Aotearoa New Zealand that continue to deliver environmental, social, and educational benefits decades later. From empowering school children to grow native forests to restoring habitats and protecting endangered species, these projects demonstrate how early investment in grassroots conservation can create lasting impact.

One of the earliest recipients was the Windy Hill Trust on Aotea/Great Barrier Island. In 1999, local landowners began restoring native habitats through predator control across 116 hectares of land, paving the way for the reintroduction of kiwi and other threatened birds.

Over the past 26 years, bird numbers have doubled, native lizards and wētā have flourished, and the sanctuary has created employment and training opportunities for local residents.

Another early grant supported the reintroduction of North Island weka to the Karori Sanctuary – now Zealandia – in Wellington. Today, Zealandia is recognised as one of New Zealand's great conservation success stories, demonstrating how

ecosystems can be restored even in urban environments. Its impact has extended well beyond its boundaries, with native birds, reptiles, and plants repopulating surrounding areas and transforming Wellington's natural landscape. Just as importantly, Zealandia has become a powerful platform for public engagement, inspiring people to rethink how cities and nature can thrive together.

More than 25 years on, the impact of these early grants continues to be felt across landscapes, communities, and generations.

This year, WWF-New Zealand continued supporting projects restoring habitats, protecting threatened species, improving freshwater ecosystems, and connecting people with nature across Aotearoa New Zealand.

This included Ocean Youth Aotearoa, which gives rangatahi hands-on marine conservation skills and experiences, inspiring many to lead conservation initiatives in their own communities. We also supported Predator Free Chathams to expand its trapping network, contributing to significant reductions in possum numbers and strengthening community-led initiatives to protect the islands' unique biodiversity.

Together, these projects are helping to empower communities, build capability, and foster long-term kaitiakitanga across Aotearoa to create lasting benefits for nature.



Driving a clean energy transition

This year, WWF-New Zealand continued advocating for a rapid and fair transition away from fossil fuels toward a cleaner, more resilient energy system.

Working alongside Lawyers for Climate Action NZ, we challenged government policies that support new fossil fuel development and highlighted the legal, economic, and environmental risks associated with expanding oil and gas production.

We commissioned public polling to better understand New Zealanders' views on energy security, affordability, and climate action. The results demonstrated strong public support for renewable energy solutions.

We also worked with Pacific partners to highlight New Zealand's responsibilities as a Pacific neighbour.

Through media engagement, public advocacy, policy analysis, and partnerships, WWF-New Zealand has continued making the case that New Zealand's energy future must be built on clean, affordable, and sustainable sources of energy.

Protecting nature and tackling climate change are inseparable challenges. By accelerating the transition to renewable energy, we can help create a safer future for both people and the planet.



Nature on the ballot

With a General Election approaching, WWF-New Zealand has been working to ensure nature remains firmly on the national agenda.

This year, we joined forces with Greenpeace Aotearoa and Forest & Bird to develop a shared roadmap for action on climate, biodiversity, and environmental protection. Together, we called on political parties to back ambitious policies that protect and restore nature and drive a clean energy transition.

We also partnered with Pure Advantage to host a panel session and screening of the documentary *Think Like a Forest* at Parliament. We brought together MPs, Ministers, business leaders and environmental experts to explore the role of nature in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. The film makes the case for Recloaking Papatūānuku, an urgent and ambitious initiative to restore Aotearoa's indigenous forests and wetlands.

Ahead of the election, we launched WWF-New Zealand's "Actions for a Healthy Ocean", outlining ten priority actions needed to restore ocean health and protect marine biodiversity.

To help supporters understand where parties stand on key ocean issues, WWF-New Zealand also hosted a major pre-election debate on ocean protection, convening political party representatives and scrutinising their policies.

As political parties set out their vision for the future, WWF-New Zealand continues to advocate for policies that safeguard the natural world upon which all New Zealanders depend.

A new generation taking action for nature

This year, young people across Aotearoa New Zealand found creative ways to support WWF-New Zealand and raise awareness about the issues facing our environment.

At ACG Parnell College in Auckland, senior students raised funds for WWF through the sale of dolphin and whale plushies, while at Auckland's Rangitoto College, students have been running a 'WWF club' to fundraise for conservation and encourage action within their school community. Founded in 2025, the club has quickly grown to 473 members, making it one of the school's fastest-growing student groups.

Throughout the year, Rangitoto students organised a range of activities including poster-making, keychain workshops, a quiz night and a sustainability challenge. Alongside fundraising, the club aimed to broaden understanding of WWF's work and inspire other schools to establish their own WWF groups.

"We were inspired to create this club because, despite being well known, WWF lacked representation in our school and across the nation," said Michael Yang on behalf of the club's student leadership team. "In creating a club at our school, while contributing to

the cause, we also hoped to inspire other communities to take this on."

Young supporters also took action in their local communities.

In Wellington, nine-year-old Coco completed a sponsored swim across Lyall Bay to raise funds for WWF after learning about whale rescue through Project Jonah. Concerned about the pressures facing marine wildlife, she used the challenge to encourage others to support ocean protection.

Year-seven student Kenzie launched her "Nature Friends" project, creating small clay creatures that were hidden along nature walks for people to discover. Each creature featured a story and QR code directing people to learn more about conservation and support WWF-New Zealand. Elsewhere, nine-year-old Aucklander Frida launched a fundraising campaign to support the protection of endangered sea turtles.

It is inspiring to see so many young people taking action for nature. As WWF-New Zealand looks ahead to the next 50 years, their energy, creativity and commitment give us reason to be optimistic about the future.



A HEARTFELT THANK YOU

None of our work would be possible without the generosity, passion and commitment of our supporters.

Whether you've donated, fundraised, signed a petition, attended an event, spoken up for nature, or simply followed and shared our work, you've helped create the impact featured throughout this report.

The challenges facing nature remain significant, but together we will keep standing up for our wild places, native species, and the ocean that sustains us.

Thank you for standing with WWF-New Zealand and for being part of this journey over the last 50 years.

Mō tātou, ā, mō ngā uri ā muri ake nei.

For us and our children after us.

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