

Annual Report

2024/25



MOUNTAINS TO SEA
CONSERVATION TRUST



**Whakamana te maunga
whakamana te wai
he mauri o ngā tangata
ngā mea katoa he pai**

*If we look after the water
from the mountains to the sea
it will look after us*

Disclaimer: This Annual Report provides a general overview of our activities from July 1 2024 to June 30 2025. While Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust strives to ensure accuracy in its delivery and engagement data, all numbers should be treated as indicative only. Financial figures presented herein pertain to the period April 1 2024 to March 31 2025. These are draft numbers only and are subject to change pending the final audit and approval by the Board.

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Assorted photography and imagery: Lorna Doogan and Sophie Journee.*

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Governance and leadership

Trustees

Sheila Taylor - Business and Financial Portfolio (Chairperson)

Katrina Goddard - Marine Science and Policy Portfolio. H&S representative (Deputy Chairperson)

Vicky Vajda McNab - Communications and Education Portfolio (Secretary)

Patrick McCann - Legal Portfolio (Treasurer)

Finley Duncan - Policy and Compliance Portfolio (Privacy Officer and Deputy Treasurer)

Tom Kelly - New Trustee 2025

Jay Changlani - New Trustee 2025

Celia Witehira - New Trustee 2025

Advisors

Vince Kerr - Marine Science and Advocacy

Manuel Springford - Te Waha Māori

Poutokomanawa – Co-Directors

Samara Nicholas - MNZM, Marine Lead, MT SCT foundation member and Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) founder

Kim Jones - Freshwater Lead, Wai Connection Project Lead, Drains to Harbour (DTH) founder, and National Īnanga Spawning Project (NISP) founder

Honoured Patron

The late Dr Roger Grace - A memorial fund has been established in Roger's name, and is administered by Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust. Moe mai rā rangatira.

What we do



Mountains to Conservation Trust provides freshwater and marine education, experiences, and on-the-ground conservation support.

Since 2001, we have facilitated 536,153 attendances at our programmes and projects across Aotearoa. Our flagship Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) and Whitebait Connection education programmes represent a significant portion of our mahi - they are supplemented by a range of conservation, education and environmental restoration services. This includes the national catchment group support project Wai Connection, and the National Inanga Spawning Programme (NISP).

In Auckland and Northland, we deliver our projects and programmes through our team of experienced ecologists and educators. In 11 other regions around the country, we work with local Provider Organisations, giving them training, support and accreditation to deliver our projects and programmes. Through this collective mahi, we are a truly national conservation organisation.

Mountains to Sea's vision

Thriving freshwater and marine environments protected and restored by connected communities.

The Trust's vision affirms that communities should ultimately hold the solutions and resources to tackle the environmental problems we face today. That's why the Trust strives to build community involvement, foster equity, and work towards a shared vision of ecological sustainability among Aotearoa's diverse communities.

In the vision of our Trust, the biodiversity of our ocean, coastal areas, our streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands are respected as a taonga (treasure). We view these systems as a whole with no boundaries. Restoration of any part of the system supports the whole.

Strategic Pou

Taiao	• Help enact active improvements to the environment • Ensure changes are increasingly monitored • Increase application of mātauranga/knowledge from a range of cultures in the communities we work with
Tangata	• Become a Tangata Tiriti organisation • Empower communities through experiential learning • Continually develop effective tools supporting advocacy and restoration
Organisation	• Develop and implement a sustainable funding model • Develop and implement a fit-for-purpose operating model • Develop and implement an effective communications and marketing strategy



Poutokomanawa message

Kia ora koutou,

As we reflect on the 2024/25 year, we are filled with pride and gratitude for the incredible momentum our Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust whānau has achieved together. This has been a year of remarkable growth, impact, and connection across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Celebrating Our Collective Impact

The numbers speak to the power of our community-driven approach: 34,790 hours of volunteer time contributed, 46,140 native plants flourishing alongside 98.7km of waterways, and an extraordinary 82,356 community engagements. But beyond these figures lies something even more meaningful – the deep connections forged between people and place, the knowledge shared across generations, and the hope planted for our tamariki.

Our National Īnanga Spawning Programme continues to expand, protecting these precious species across Northland and Auckland and beyond. Meanwhile, our Wai Connection project has now supported over 400 catchment groups nationwide, demonstrating how local action can create ripples of change from the mountains to the sea.

We're particularly proud of our cultural approach to conservation. From supporting Te Rangi-I-Taiāwhiaotia Trust of Te Whanau Moana Me Te Rorohuri hapū at the Maitai Bay rāhui monitoring to delivering our powerful training wānanga to 50 people in Hawke's Bay, we continue to honour the truth that caring for our environment and caring for our communities are inseparable.

Innovation and Growth

This year has seen remarkable innovation in how we share knowledge and support action. We've upgraded our digital platforms, created open-source educational resources, and launched a well-run Te Ika O Te Tau (Fish of the Year) campaign, which engaged over 5,000 voters – demonstrating how storytelling and celebration can drive conservation awareness.

Our He Kākano native plant nursery grew over 10,000 plants for restoration projects, while our team achieved every major goal we set ourselves, from comprehensive safety management systems to strengthened partnerships with Foundation North and other key supporters.

Looking Forward with Purpose

As we move into 2025/26, we're energised by ambitious goals that will deepen our impact. We're expanding our National Īnanga Spawning Programme into three new regions, launching our comprehensive CRM platform to better coordinate our national efforts, and developing sustainable funding models that will secure our catchment group support services for years to come.

We're also committed to growing our storytelling capacity – because every restoration project, every monitoring programme, and every community engagement is a story of learning and hope that needs to be shared widely.

Ngā Mihi

None of this mahi would be possible without our dedicated team, our generous funders, our committed volunteers, and the communities who welcome us into their places of significance. Together, we're proving that grassroots conservation, guided by mātauranga Māori and powered by community passion, can create lasting change.

As we continue our journey from the mountains to the sea, we carry with us the knowledge that healthy ecosystems and thriving communities grow together. The seeds we plant today – whether native plants along our waterways or ideas in the minds of young conservationists – will flourish for generations to come.

Mauri ora,

Kim Jones and Samara Nicholas
Poutokomanawa/Co-Directors
Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust



Message from the Board Chair

A Year of Growth and Resilience

Reflecting on the year ended March 2025, Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) achieved remarkable scale and impact while navigating complex challenges. This was our biggest delivery year both regionally in Auckland and Northland, and nationally through the Wai Connection programme, dramatically expanding our reach while maintaining our grassroots community focus.

Organisational Evolution

MTSCT has progressed from a small to medium-sized organisation, strengthening operational foundations with more robust systems and processes while preserving our nimble, community-responsive approach. Our visibility and recognition grew substantially through Wai Connection's success and initiatives like Fish of the Year. Most significantly, our identity as a community enabler crystallized - we're increasingly recognised as playing a connecting role in grassroots conservation efforts nationwide, with funding partnerships beginning to reflect this function.

Building Enduring Partnerships

Our evolving political environment presents ongoing opportunities to strengthen

collaborative approaches to conservation. Our focus remains on fostering productive working relationships with decision-makers across the political spectrum (including tangata whenua) and supporting long-term evidence-based solutions. By connecting communities, tangata whenua, government, and stakeholders around shared values (protecting our natural environment for future generations) we create a stable foundation for conservation progress that transcends individual political cycles and delivers practical outcomes for all.

Climate Adaptation in Action

Climate change reality permeates our work. Our National Inanga Spawning Programme (NISP) has become an inadvertent climate adaptation project, documenting how changing temperatures and flows affect spawning cycles. Through Wai Connection, we're helping 400 catchment groups build adaptive capacity, incorporating climate projections into riparian restoration and monitoring. Our marine programmes reveal changes in species distributions and ecosystem health aligning with ocean warming and acidification patterns. We're not just educating about conservation—we're helping communities understand and prepare for the changing times ahead.

Learning Journey

We've been privileged to begin learning about authentic engagement with Pasifika communities here in Taitokerau. Through generous talanoa, we've gained insights into cultural identity complexity in modern Aotearoa, including that 30-40% of individuals with Pacific heritage also have Māori heritage. This learning journey reflects our commitment to better serving diverse communities meaningfully, acknowledging that effective conservation requires many voices, perspectives, and ways of connecting with blue spaces. Future approaches will honour Pacific frameworks like Vā while fostering authentic partnerships with Māori as tangata whenua and the wider community.

Impact and Connection

Despite mounting challenges, community engagement reached new heights across all programmes. The breadth and depth of connection we've facilitated between people and their blue spaces represents our work's heart - thousands of moments where communities discovered, explored, and committed to caring for local environments. From children experiencing marine reserves to whānau learning inanga lifecycles, from volunteers contributing restoration hours to

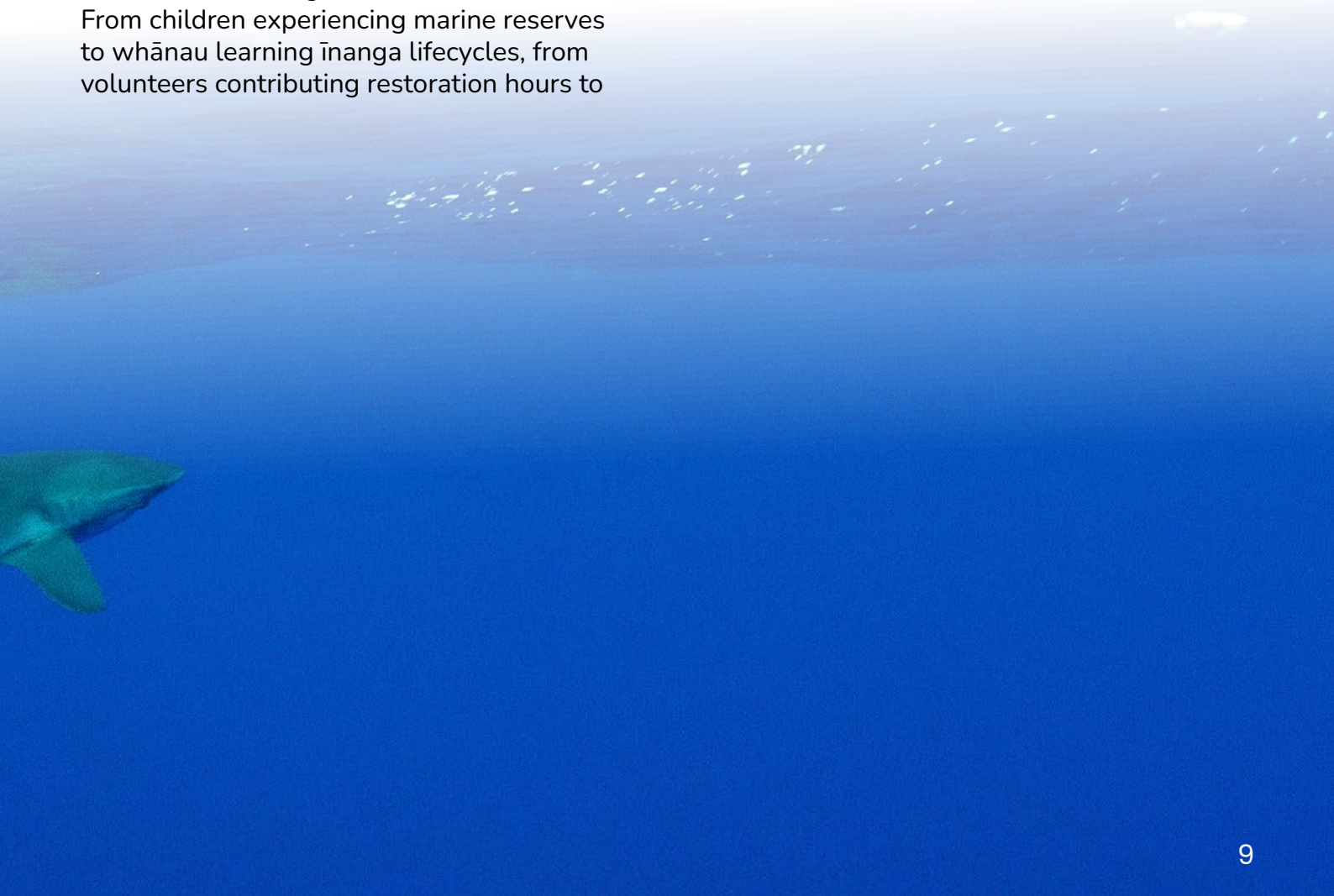
catchment groups taking waterway ownership - these connections create foundations for lasting conservation impact.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, we all face uncertainty but unprecedented opportunity. Proposed resource management reforms create educational advocacy chances for environmental protection. Our partnership success demonstrates how community-led conservation delivers environmental, social and cultural outcomes. As policy environments shift and climate impacts accelerate, organisations building genuine community-place connections while advancing matauranga and science-based conservation become critical. We're not just protecting blue spaces - we're nurturing relationships that make protection possible. When people truly connect with local blue spaces, they become unstoppable advocates for protection.

"Ko te wai te ora o nga mea katoa" - Water is the life of all things.

Sheila Taylor
Board Chair



Impact since 2001



536,153

attendances
at activities
around
Aotearoa

280,734

attendances at
activities in
Northland &
Auckland



373,453.8

hours of volunteer
time donated



Worth

\$10,382,021

at living wage
of \$27.80/hr

2000+



events run



Including



Snorkel
Days



Paddle
Days



Planting
Days



Spotlight
Evenings

and more

3100 +

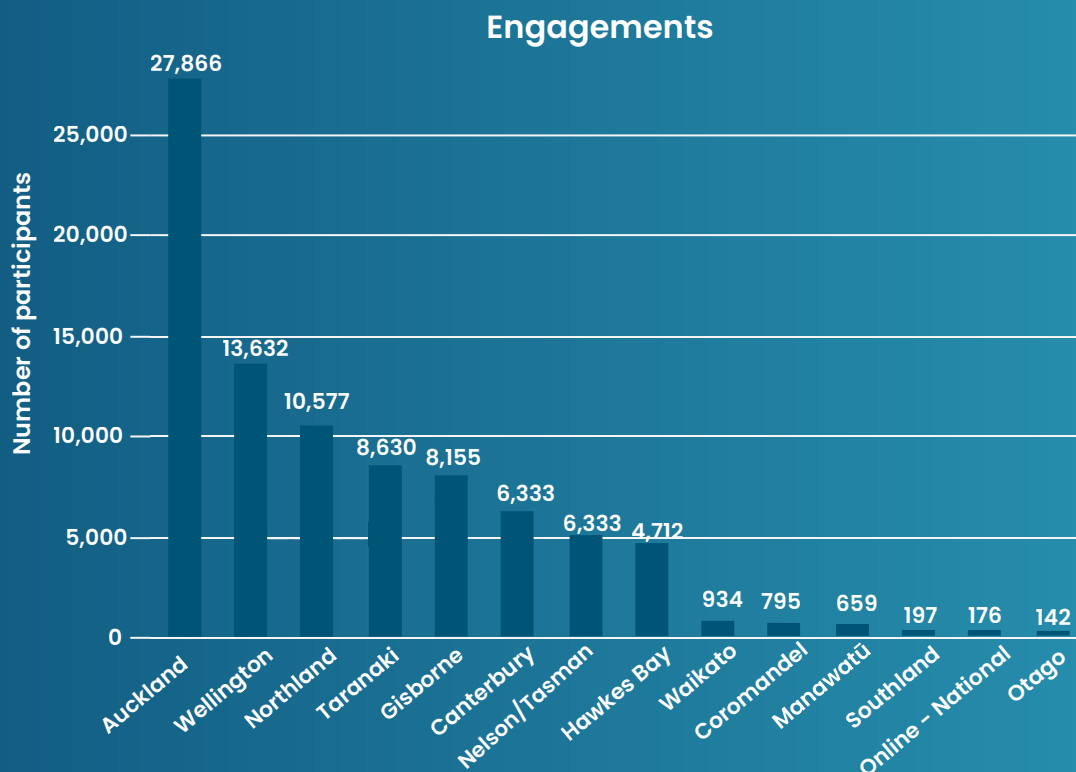
school
programmes run



382,986

student
engagements
in te taiao

Impact and activities 2024/25



Impact and activities includes...

46,840



Native seedlings
planted

9758



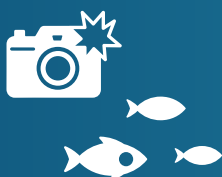
Student snorkel
experiences

13,575



Litres rubbish
removed

186



Species observations
logged in iNaturalist

63km



Riparian habitat
restored

31



Īnanga spawning
habitats found

Ngā maunga ki te moana – our operating environment

Successes, challenges, and opportunities



The past year for Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) has been one of unprecedented growth and impact, a testament to the power of our community-centric approach. We have expanded our reach dramatically, leveraging over two decades of expertise to connect communities from the Cape to the Bluff. The success of the Wai Connection project, in particular, proves our model delivers measurable environmental and social outcomes at a national scale.

However, this period of success also brings us to a critical inflection point.

Environmental degradation continues more or less unabated in large areas of Aotearoa and the planet at large. Despite widespread advocacy efforts across the environmental sector, there remains a gulf between many peoples' awareness of the problem, and the general public being empowered and enabled to do something about it.

The last year has provided us with a tantalising glimpse of what people and communities can achieve if they're connected and resourced to protect their waterways. But given the vital funding that powered much of this mahi is tapering off, we face an urgent challenge to secure our future and ensure this extraordinary momentum is not lost.

The dual challenge: funding uncertainty in a changing climate

Climate change is here. It is not a theoretical threat, but an active force reshaping our environment. In this context, our mahi illustrates the ongoing threats it presents, but also the path required to help mitigate it.

Through our marine mahi, we see how species distributions and ecosystem health are changing due to ocean warming and acidification. *Centrostrophus*

urchin populations and the fast-moving expansion of caulerpa seaweed - both exacerbated by warmer water temperatures - are indicative of these challenges.

At the same time, our freshwater initiatives, like the National Īnanga Spawning Programme (NISP), have become an essential climate adaptation project, illustrating the critical role wetlands and restored riparian habitats play in alleviating the worst impacts of increasingly-frequent heavy rainfall events.

Through our engagement with over 400 catchment groups via Wai Connection, we are directly empowering communities to build resilience by incorporating climate projections into their restoration efforts.

In short, our role is no longer just about conservation. We are building the adaptive capacity and resilience needed to survive and thrive in a changing world.

Despite this vital work, the foundation of our operations is unstable. Underneath the amazing breadth and scope of work lies a stark reality: almost all our mahi is tied to fixed-term, finite projects and funding sources.

As a result, the entirety of our team is on fixed-term contracts. The precariousness of this model was starkly revealed when the extension for Wai Connection funding was confirmed just six weeks before the previous term ended. Some key project staff took other roles in the face of this uncertainty. Their skills and experience went with them.

This sentiment is echoed by our partners, with one stakeholder in the Wai Connection report noting, "sustainable long-term funding would be the one change I would make if it were up to me."

This is a moment of profound vulnerability for MTSCT. The very success of our delivery over the last two years means we have a greater burden of responsibility to

our communities and a larger, more experienced team supporting them. To falter now would be a disservice to the thousands of people who have grown their passion for conservation through our work.

Connections have been made, work is underway. The onus is on us to ensure we maintain momentum.

Our role is clear

He taura whiri kotahi mai anō te kopunga tae noa ki te pu au

From the source to the mouth of the sea, all things are joined together as one

Our very name emphasises connection between systems. Fittingly, our identity - both internally and externally - has developed in the last year in a way that reflects this.

We specialise in the messy mahi of interpersonal and inter-system connections. If a community group asks for specialist native freshwater fish passage support we can't provide, we'll connect them with someone who can. If an iwi wants advice on how to set up a rāhui, we'll take the time to find out what they need, who can best support them, and help organise hui with other regional stakeholders. We build relationships and connections that endure - with or without us.

In the last year, the term 'glue' or 'gel' often comes up when we ask our partners what they value about us. Depending on the metaphor, we help bind things together, or allow parts to move independently while maintaining a meaningful connection to other important pieces.

Our mahi in the last year provides compelling evidence of this.

The Wai Connection project alone has engaged with more than 400 catchment and community groups in the last two years - exceeding the project target by 300%. While the number is impressive, the capacity built and community connections forged are where the real promise of intergenerational impact lies. Thanks to group trainings, wānanga, and regional collaboration, these groups are now developing connections with each other, mana whenua, and the wider scientific support ecosystem for the long term.

This same connection-led approach is at the heart of our marine mahi. Our Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) programme introduced thousands of Kiwis to the marine environment last year, sowing the seeds of katiakitanga. In and out of the water, we have continued to provide administrative and engagement support for the Maitai Bay and Mimiwhangata rāhui. We have also partnered with iwi/hapū to empower the next generation through our Marine Mahi for Rangatahi project, fostering youth leadership and a deep sense of environmental stewardship.

Some of the connections we build have clear financial components. We continue to act as an umbrella funding organisation for fledgling community groups, enabling them to get on with mahi on the ground.

This support, along with our ongoing marine monitoring and restoration assistance for community activities like Mediterranean Fanworm removal and kina management, are a testament to our maturing identity as a community enabler and connector.

Critically, this identity doesn't just contribute to our role in the environmental sector. It charts a clear path forward.

Investing in connection and on-the-ground action

The next step is clear: we must diversify funding streams to secure the future of our work, and ensure the mahi we've started and connections we've built can continue delivering tangible benefits for te taiao.

The impending conclusion of our major Wai Connection funding brings this into sharper focus. Corporate partnerships, grants, and individual philanthropy are not just a desirable addition to our income; they will be a vital lifeline. Without them, we risk cutting programmes at their peak productivity, just as our community partners are seeing their greatest gains. As one regional coordinator poignantly stated, "we [risk] essentially ceasing the programme when it is delivering at its most productive."

We have the track record to prove investing in Mountains to Sea means investing in a proven model of high-impact conservation. It's a model built not just on concrete actions, but also on the enduring connections that lead to intergenerational improvements. This support will enable us to expand our NISP programme into new regions, launch a comprehensive CRM platform to better coordinate our national efforts, and continue to provide the bespoke, high-quality support that has made Wai Connection so successful.

By supporting us, partners can align with an organisation that is a trusted partner to iwi/hapū, central and local government, community groups, and a leader in on-the-ground community-led restoration.

In a world facing unprecedented environmental challenges, our mahi offers a powerful antidote of action, hope, and community. Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust is not just a leader; we are a vital resource for communities across Aotearoa.

Many of our partners view our mahi as indispensable in confronting the environmental challenges they face. Now the onus is on us to broaden our partnerships in a way that ensures our mahi endures.



Organisational Growth

This year has marked a period of significant organisational maturation for Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust. We've strengthened our operational foundations by implementing clear KPIs linked to our strategy, updating all staff contracts with comprehensive role descriptions, and maintaining our Adventure Activity accreditation alongside a comprehensive Safety Management System.

Our digital infrastructure has evolved substantially with the upgrade of our main website and the continued development of our NĪSHRP ESRI Hub and Field Collection Apps.

Perhaps most importantly, we've expanded our geographical reach through the Wai Connection project into second tranche regions including Waikato, Manawatu-Wanganui, Otago and Southland, while simultaneously deepening our capacity to support over 400 catchment groups nationwide. This growth reflects not just increased scale, but enhanced systems and processes that position us as a truly national organisation capable of delivering consistent, high-quality conservation support from community to regional levels.

Strategy development

Our Board of Trustees introduced three strategic pillars to guide our strategy development, which our Poutokomanawa then presented and workshopped with our team with support from the Centre for Social Impact (CSI). This collaborative process allowed us to:

- Refine these pillars into pou (pillars of support)
- Create authentic aspirations with our team

- Ground our goals in grassroots mahi (work)
- Determine the best ways to measure our success

The result is a strategy that balances the wisdom and oversight of our governance and leadership team with the practical insights of our staff, ensuring our objectives are both ambitious and achievable.

Health and Safety

Much of the trust's credibility is based on outstanding safety standards, and exceptional safety record and our efforts to continually improve safety management, procedures and a positive safety culture.

Emergency preparedness, SOP practise, health and safety feedback and communication was achieved at our zoom national coordinator meeting, wananga training at the Hawkes Bay (2024) and our traditional wanaga at Onuku in April 2025. Regional team meetings and regular communication via emails and zoom catch ups has allowed the team to engage in our SMS. Our new crew newsletters help to make health and safety fun.

A review of our SMP and SOP manuals has been undertaken. The trust has made some new infographics throughout our updated documents. The trust continues to have a separate Risk Register and Hazard ID for MTSCCT, split into marine and freshwater overall, which is reviewed annually or when required .

Since 2002 we have led a total of 213,385 snorkel experiences - with 19,558 of those in the last season.

We passed our 2025 Adventure Activity Safety Surveillance Audit - valid until September 2026.

Additional challenges

Team capacity - while we did a huge amount of work in the reporting period, teams have been very busy as a result. This has meant we haven't been able to follow through on some expressions of interest, or to engage proactively with certain groups or organisations in the way we'd like.

Technological and process constraints - like many fast-growing organisations, MTSCCT had not had a fundraising or contact database since its inception. Many technological solutions we've implemented have existed in isolation from one another and/or team members haven't had the capacity to ensure they're implemented to best-practice standard. This has resulted in duplication and inconsistent processes in work management and fundraising. Addressing this challenge is a high priority for the organisation.





Programmes and projects





Our national Wai Connection project, funded by the Ministry for the Environment, is designed to upskill and build capacity in catchment communities. Mountains to Sea delivers this project in partnership with a network of local provider organisations in 13 regions.

In its second full year, Wai Connection has achieved significant momentum and impact:



More than 400 catchment groups supported from the Far North to Southland (includes 2023)



33,699 engagements at education and training events/sessions



22,920 attendances at community engagement events



3,926 attendances at monitoring and restoration events

Connecting to the Whangapouri awa



The Whangapouri creek is an unassuming awa running 15km from Pukekohe to the Pahurehure inlet on Auckland's Manukau Harbour.

The creek runs through some fairly intensive agricultural areas, presenting some obvious challenges for water health. But with help from committed locals and expert support from Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust, the future for this awa is looking bright.

Through funding from the Wai Connection project, Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust has engaged with local farmers, landowners, schools, and community groups to improve the health of the awa.

"We've been able to support īnanga spawning habitat restoration...planting, weeding, and pest reduction. We've also been able to connect a large number of local schools and community groups to their local awa," says Catchment Coordinator Kate McKessar.

For landowners, the support has made a significant difference.

"We've been able to do a lot of planting and weeding through the Wai Connection programme," says local Karaka landowner Kim Stychinsky. "We've also learned a lot about how to restore and maintain the īnanga

spawning habitat on our property, and had the chance to invite schools and groups to come and get involved in the restoration work we're doing."

On April 7th 2025, Waiau Pa Scouts visited Kim's family farm for a spotlighting and education evening. Kids learned about macroinvertebrates, īnanga, and the different species of tuna (eel) that call the awa home.

Callan was one of more than 30 excited youngsters who got up close and personal with the creek and its critters. "We saw a huge eel, and we named it Big Fin," he says.

As well as the Scouts, Rosehill Intermediate, Pukehoke North, and Pukekohe Valley primary schools have experienced the creek close up.

"The schools have undertaken our Whitebait Connection education programme, introducing them to important freshwater conservation principles, and have applied what they've learned to create their own restoration plans," says Kate.

For Kim and her family, Wai Connection funding has helped build on the environmental work they've done on their property over many years. More than that, it has also connected a large number of locals to the awa.

"It's great to have other people experience the wetland, and the area we've regenerated. Hopefully they're more aware of what's in this creek, and what they can do to look after it in the future." - **Kim Stychinsky, Landowner beside the Whangapouri Awa**



EXPERIENCING MARINE RESERVES

The Experiencing Marine Reserves programme was delivered in seven regions across the country in 2024/25, giving people from across the country the chance to experience and engage with our marine environment.



27,966 engagements using the EMR H&S, 16,857 of those in Northland/Auckland



83 community events run using EMR components, 63 of which occurred in Auckland and Northland



7049 participants at community events, 5116 of which occurred in Auckland and Northland



Far North Whānau Reconnect with the Moana at Maitai Bay Snorkel Day



In January 2025, over 200 Far North locals took to the water at Maitai Bay for a community snorkel day focused on water safety, confidence-building, and marine awareness. The event, supported by Water Safety New Zealand, was delivered through the Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) programme in partnership with Te Whānau Moana me Te Rorohuri.

Held in the calm, sheltered waters of the rāhui-protected bay, participants - many of them first-timers - were guided by trained volunteers, local hapū members, and team members from Mountains to Sea.

The rāhui, established in 2017 by Te Whānau Moana/Te Rorohuri to support marine regeneration, offered the perfect backdrop for locals to safely practise snorkelling skills and reconnect with their local moana.

“We felt Maitai Bay needed a chance to rejuvenate - fish numbers were declining and

we wanted to protect them for our mokopuna. It’s great to help organise events like this and show our community the rāhui is working,” says Te Rangi-i-Taiāwhiaotia Trust spokesperson Kataraina Rhind (Ngāti Kahu).

Participants learned essential snorkelling safety tips such as reading conditions, staying within limits, and signalling for help—all while observing marine life returning to the area. The abundance of snapper, blue mao mao, and even a gurnard thrilled attendees and reinforced the benefits of the rāhui.

With strong support from Te Rangi-i-Taiāwhiaotia Trust, Far North REAP, and DOC, the snorkel day was a true community effort. Mountains to Sea looks forward to returning in 2026 to host another EMR community snorkel day, and continue empowering communities with the skills and confidence to enjoy the moana safely.

“The kids loved their day with their instructor Whaea Ruby-Anne, and loved to see the snapper and kina. We can’t wait to come back next year!” - Whānau from Kaitaia



WHITEBAIT CONNECTION

The Whitebait Connection programme is run in nine regions across the country. It aims to introduce children (and adults) to the mauri of our freshwater ecosystems, the wildlife that inhabit it, and the challenges we must address to ensure our freshwater spaces are protected.

With assistance from the Wai Connection funding pool, the programme reached a huge number of students and communities in 2024/25.



39,449 engagements using WBC H&S nationally



22,905 of those for Northland and Auckland



Māngere Central School learn about what lives in their awa



In November 2024, Māngere Central School participated in both the EMR and Whitebait Connection programmes.

During the in-class WBC component, students learned about the wildlife that lives in our streams, rivers, and lakes. They also learned about water quality, and the challenges facing our freshwater environments.

After this, students visited their local environment - Harania Stream - and analysed the health of the waterway.

Their next trip was to Te Kohuroa/Matheson's Bay - a small-but-thriving catchment beside Leigh in North Auckland.

Here, the students did water quality testing, explored the stream's biodiversity, and learned about this stream's health compared to the one in their own rohe.

Lastly, the students came up with an action plan to help restore their own awa, using what they had learned during their in-class learning and hands-on experiences at Kohuroa Stream.

"Connecting communities with their local awa and freshwater environment helps them see the ecosystem in a whole new light. They understand what's in their waterway, and what's required to protect it."

- Patricia Hawkins, Whitebait Connection Programme Lead

NĪSHRP AND NĪSP

The 2024/25 year saw the Northland Īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project (NĪSHRP) finish up. However, Department of Conservation provided funding to create a scale up plan for this mahi through the National Īnanga Spawning Programme (NĪSP), recognising its value, with a view to delivering it across the country.

With NĪSP-aligned education and restoration activities occurring across Aotearoa as part of the Wai Connection project, there has been significant progress made in long-term Īnanga habitat restoration across the country.

- **1,091 engagements** in salt water wedge assessments, egg searches, artificial habitat installation
- **336 monitoring activities** undertaken
- **219 Īnanga spawning habitats** found since 2015



NĪSHRP leaves a lasting legacy



The Northland Īnanga Spawning Habitat Restoration Project (NĪSHRP), a Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust initiative, has been a hugely successful, three-year effort to protect and restore Īnanga (whitebait) spawning habitats in Northland. The project's work, largely funded by the Ministry for the Environment, has focused on identifying, protecting, and enhancing crucial spawning sites.

Through this project, we have worked collaboratively with mana whenua, community groups and landowners, combining scientific expertise with local knowledge.

The outcomes on the ground have been impressive. The project has identified 30 new

spawning sites, fenced off 4km of riparian land, and planted 20,000 native plants to stabilize banks and create safe habitats for Īnanga eggs. The project has also focused on community education, empowering local people with the skills to monitor and manage these sites long-term.

With NĪSHRP's initial work now complete, our attention now turns to the National Īnanga Spawning Project (NĪSP). NĪSP is about scaling up our efforts and applying the valuable lessons learned in Northland on a much wider scale across Aotearoa. The goal is to build a nationwide network of communities and organisations that can identify, protect, and restore Īnanga spawning habitats, safeguarding this vital taonga species for future generations.

"NĪSHRP has been an amazing mixture of grassroots action led by communities, and supported by some great science backing."

- Amy McDonald, Councillor, Northland Regional Council

Conservation, monitoring, and restoration work



Marine Mahi for Rangatahi



Coordinator Pippa with Te Rau and Danika after an ocean litter cleanup

For more than two decades, MTSCT has worked toward connecting tangata to their local freshwater and marine environments — kia kotahi ai tātou me te taiao. One of the threads in that vision is our Marine Mahi for Rangatahi project, empowering the next generation through real-world experiences and hands-on conservation action thanks to the generous support of SkyCity.

This project supports rangatahi wellbeing by connecting them with the ocean and freshwater environments, fostering leadership, building environmental literacy, and nurturing a deep sense of kaitiakitanga. Through paid cadetships, mentoring, and hands-on experience in water quality monitoring, habitat restoration, and marine education, these young leaders gain the tools they need to protect te taiao and inspire others.

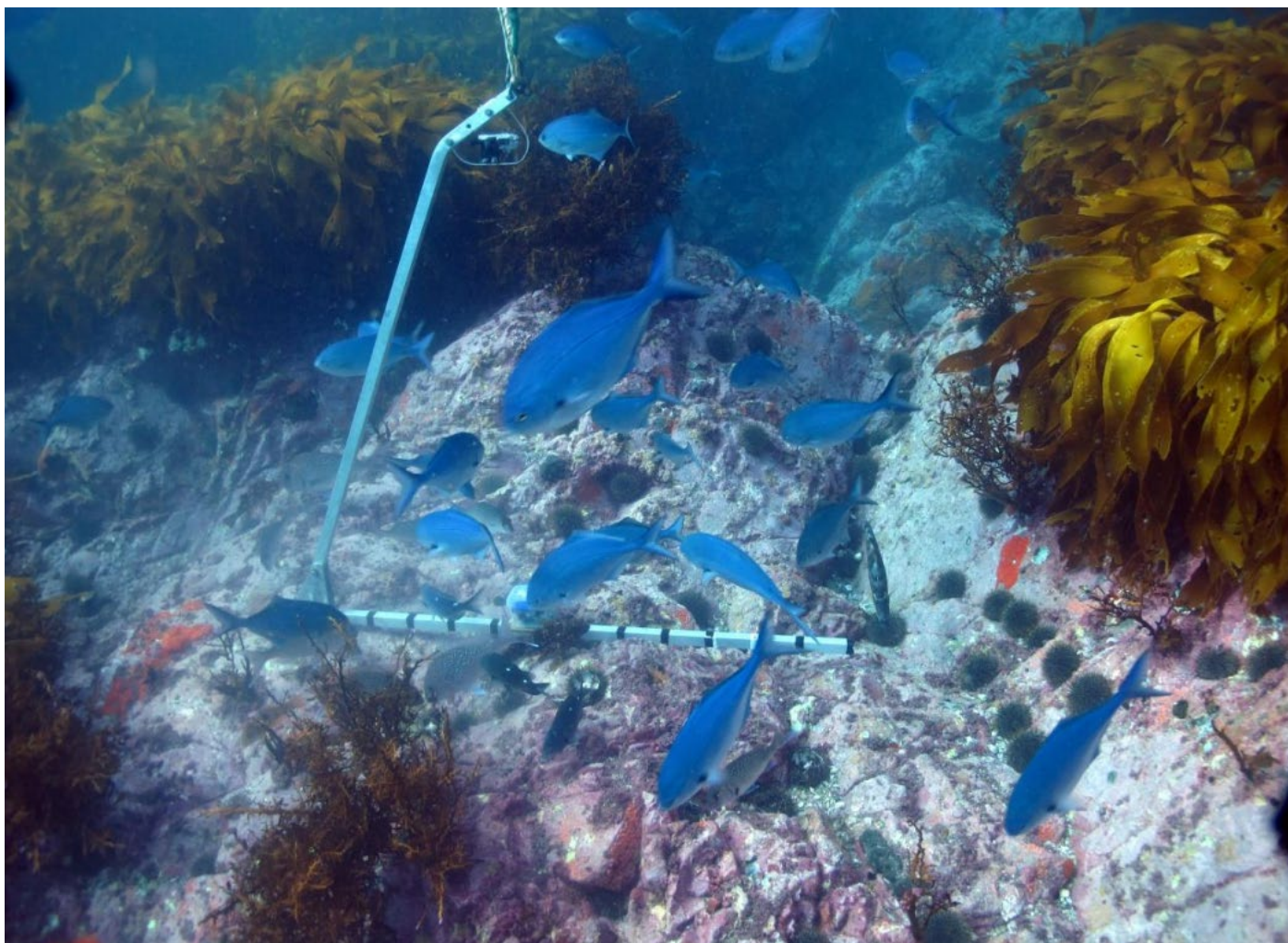
The key goals of the Marine Mahi for Rangatahi programme are to:

- Empower and inspire communities to achieve their environmental aspirations
- Remove barriers to connecting with te taiao
- Restore the mauri from the mountains to the sea
- Develop rangatahi leadership and volunteer pathways
- Support facilitated mentorships for future environmental stewards

2024/25 programme cadet Te Rau has built strong professional and hands-on marine conservation skills...skills that will stand him in good stead for what comes next.

"The programme has been nothing short of amazing. I can see myself doing this mahi for a long time to come." - Te Rau, Marine Mahi For Rangatahi Cadet

Maitai Bay Rāhui



The rāhui (traditional fishing ban) at Maitai Bay, implemented by Te Whānau Moana me Te Rorohuri in 2017, is restoring Maitai Bay marine ecosystem. The rāhui has now been in place for eight years. MTSCT have supported the rāhui since its inception.

This year, observations began provided significant signs that the rāhui was making a tangible difference.

Timed swim surveys recorded 9,487 fish across 34 transects, while baited underwater videos documented 503 fish from 32 species. The top six species in abundance were snapper (345), two-spot demoiselle (47), trevally (46), pigfish (14), yellow moray eel (13), and golden snapper (12).

Juvenile populations of crayfish species also

appear to be increasing, suggesting intensive kina management and lack of fishing pressures are starting to make a tangible increase in the health and biodiversity of the ecosystem. This is balanced by the worrying appearance of large *Centrostephanus* urchins.

MTSCT also supports the rāhui through community engagement (see EMR story) and administration support for Te Rangi-I-Taiāwhiaotia Trust. The annual community snorkelling days, a collaboration with the local hapū, are a key component of this. These events allow locals and visitors to witness the rejuvenating marine environment firsthand, fostering a sense of kaitiakitanga and demonstrating that the rāhui is a successful and respected tool for marine conservation.

“Monitoring data indicates a promising recovery of snapper populations, with biomass increasing sevenfold since 2018 and now reaching approximately half the levels observed in the Leigh Marine Reserve. .” - Wallace and Kerr, Rāhui Monitoring Report, 2025

Community-based freshwater monitoring

Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust (MTSCT) teaches community groups a range of skills to conduct effective, science-based freshwater monitoring. Wai Connection funding has supercharged this mahi across the country.

Between June 30th, 2024, and July 1st, 2025, the Trust has focused on training catchment groups and supporting their journey towards independent community-based monitoring and restoration. A major component is stream health monitoring, where groups learn how to conduct macroinvertebrate surveys and scientific monitoring.

Part of the process involves identifying aquatic insects and other invertebrates that act as indicators of water quality. We also teach communities how to use a range of tools, including the NIWA Stream Health Monitoring and Assessment Kit (SHMAK), to measure key indicators like water clarity, temperature, and pH.

MTSCT has also been instrumental in the national implementation of a Quality Assurance Framework for Community-based Monitoring. This framework, which includes a comprehensive guidance manual and a monitoring plan template, ensures that the data collected by community groups is “fit for purpose” and of a known quality. This is crucial for enabling the data to be used by regional councils and other science organisations to inform larger-scale environmental management.

The Wai Connection project also focuses on training groups in eDNA kits for environmental DNA sampling, as well as broader skills in strategic planning, communication, and volunteer engagement, helping communities not only monitor but also effectively advocate for and implement restoration projects.



Education and engagement



Fish of the Year



The 2025 Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust Fish of the Year campaign was a resounding success, capturing the imagination of New Zealanders and shining a spotlight on the often-overlooked inhabitants of our deep seas.

Compared to previous years, the campaign achieved unprecedented media exposure, largely thanks to the unexpected victory of the blobfish.

This year's competition saw a massive jump in public engagement, with over 5,500 votes cast - a staggering five-fold increase from the 1,021 votes in 2024.

The contest became a national phenomenon, particularly during the final week, when a passionate radio campaign by More FM hosts Sarah and Flynny for the 'underdog' blobfish went viral. As well as most major national outlets, the win was covered by CNN in America,

BBC, and ABC News in Australia.

This lighthearted, fun-loving approach tapped into the public's fascination with the bizarre and the unknown. The media coverage wasn't just about the vote count; it was a deep dive into the unique adaptations of the blobfish and its vulnerable deep-sea habitat. The campaign shined a spotlight on what lurks below the surface, highlighting the threats of deep-sea trawling that endanger both the blobfish and its runner-up, the orange roughy.

The blobfish's unlikely win transformed it from a meme into a symbol of conservation, proving that even the most peculiar creatures can inspire a national conversation about protecting our marine environment.

A huge thank you to all the event partners and fish sponsors. You helped get the ball rolling, and made the event the success it became.

"We're absolutely thrilled New Zealanders have taken such an interest in our native fish, and the conservation challenges affecting them." - Kim Jones, MTSCT Poutokomanawa

Engagement events



One of Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust's strengths is being flexible and nimble with how we meet the needs of the communities we work with. Wai Connection funding has allowed us to expand this philosophy (via provider organisations) over most areas of the country.

As a result, MTSCT has delivered, supported, and funded a wide range of events over the reporting period. This encompasses:

- 633 community engagement events around Aotearoa, engaging 30,017 people.
- 238 community engagement events in Northland/Auckland, engaging 11,079 people.

Community Engagement events includes:

- Kayak days
- Stand-up paddleboard experiences
- Planting days
- Spotlighting events
- Snorkel experiences
- Presentation - MTSCT led

- Presentation - MTSCT crew as a guest speaker/attendee
- Corporate engagements
- Land-based events
- Mountains to Sea Wānanga
- Stream workshop
- Clean up
- Native plant nursery open day
- Taiao Day (Tasman Bay Guardians)
- Night snorkel
- MTSCT facilitated hui
- Field days
- Agency engagement
- Biodiversity day
- Community event
- Volunteer outreach presentation
- Weeding event
- Catchment group engagement

Annual Poor Knights competition trip

Mountains to Sea's 2025 annual trip to the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve was a resounding success, inspiring the next generation of kaitiaki (guardians). The trip, an annual prize for students in the Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR) programme, rewarded students from across Aotearoa for their outstanding conservation action plans.

Supported by partners like DIVE! Tutukākā, the Bobby Stafford-Bush Foundation, and Wetti wetsuits, the immersive experience at one of the world's top dive sites provided a firsthand look at the power of marine protection.

The students engaged in a range of activities,

including diving and snorkeling, where they witnessed the rich biodiversity and incredible topography of the marine reserve. This year, the trip also coincided with a special effort by the Department of Conservation to address the overpopulation of long-spined sea urchins.

The students' experiences, from seeing dolphins and seals to exploring the famous Riko Riko Cave, reinforced the importance of conservation. Inspired by their trip, two students from Tinopai School plan to create a community mural to highlight the need for marine protection, demonstrating how the journey sparked a lifelong passion for ocean conservation.



"This was a really fun experience for me. I've never experienced anything like it. Thank you to everybody, all of the organisations that had help supported doing this trip." - Kaden, Auckland

School programmes

Our annual school deliveries across Northland and Auckland reached an incredible scale, with some help from Wai Connection funding for key catchments. Through our mahi with schools, we continued our mission to connect rangatahi with their aquatic environment. In the past year, we successfully delivered 120+ programme elements to students from more than 80 different schools. This wide-ranging outreach involved two of our core programmes: Experiencing Marine Reserves (EMR), which focuses on marine biodiversity and protection, and the Whitebait Connection (WBC), which centres on freshwater ecosystems, native fish,

and riparian restoration.

A significant and encouraging trend is the growing number of schools requesting programmes that integrate both EMR and WBC elements. This true 'Mountains to Sea' focus provides students with a holistic understanding, reinforcing the critical message that our aquatic ecosystems - from the highest streams to the open ocean - are an interconnected whole, with no natural boundaries. By fostering this perspective, we are empowering the next generation of kaitiaki with the knowledge and passion to protect every part of the water cycle.



2025 Mountains to Sea Wānanga



The Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust's 2025 Wānanga, hosted at Ōnuku Marae in Akaroa, was a powerful gathering focused on 'Celebrating Our Impact and Building Resilience.' Held from April 14–16, this annual event brought together a diverse group of freshwater and marine conservation champions from across Aotearoa.

The wānanga provided a crucial platform for professional development and networking. Participants engaged in hands-on workshops and field trips, blending mātauranga Māori and scientific knowledge to explore local ecosystems and conservation challenges. A key theme

was the reflection on the successes of the Wai Connection project, which aims to empower communities to restore and protect waterways. Discussions focused on identifying ongoing needs and developing a forward-thinking action plan for individuals, communities, and the national collective.

The event not only celebrated past achievements but also strengthened the collaborative foundation for future work, emphasising the importance of partnerships with mana whenua, local communities, and scientists to ensure the long-term health of New Zealand's environment.

Other wānanga and hui

Beyond our direct programme and service deliveries, a significant portion of our work involved hosting and facilitating key hui and wānanga to support educators, community leaders, and farmers.

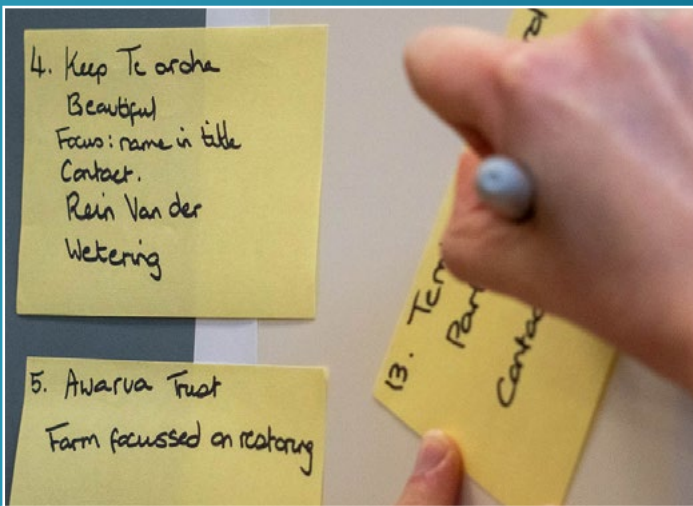
A major focus this period was a specialized training wānanga held in Hawke's Bay. This was crucial for advancing the Community Based Freshwater Management (CBFM) and NĪSP programmes. By bringing together educators and practitioners, we ensured that these vital initiatives and skills are delivered consistently and effectively across different regions, promoting best-practice approaches for managing our awa and moana.

Closer to home, we demonstrated our commitment to recognizing and celebrating local environmental champions by sponsoring the Catchment Group Showcase at the Ballance Farm Environment Awards evening for the

Auckland region. This event provided a vital platform for showcasing the hard work of local farmers and community groups who are leading positive change in their catchment.

Finally, our team played an active role in helping facilitate numerous other hui and events throughout the year. This support extended to a wide variety of catchment and community groups, both within our core rohe and beyond. These engagements ranged from organising professional development and capacity-building workshops, to speaking at community consultation meetings on local environmental issues. By providing logistical, educational, and facilitation support, we empower grassroots groups to translate their passion into tangible, on-the-ground conservation outcomes, reinforcing the powerful connection between people and te taiao.

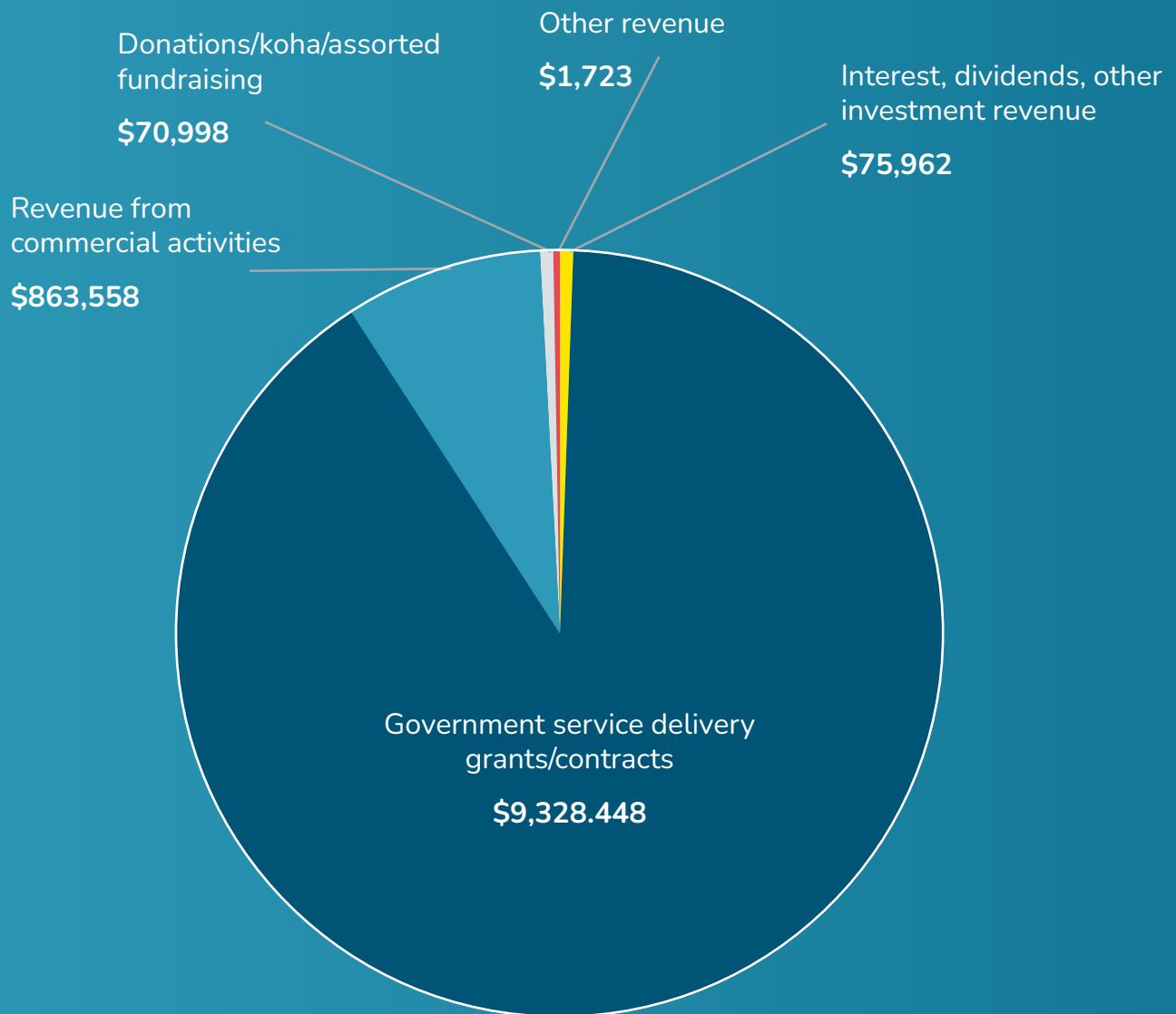




Financial information

Draft figures only

Income



Total revenue: \$10,340,419

As discussed earlier in this report, the bulk of Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust's income during the 2024/25 financial year came from government sources, and was tied to explicit deliverables. Of this, Wai Connection funding from Ministry for the Environment was by far the largest single stream of income, far exceeding all other sources combined. Much of the Wai Connection funding pool was diverted directly to Provider Organisations around the country.

Expenses



Total expenses: \$10,244,110

EOFY surplus: \$96,309

The chart above illustrates both the organisation’s biggest strength, and its biggest challenge: the vast majority of MTSCT’s income is spent on programme and project delivery. That offers extraordinary value and impact for funders and partners, but also reflects the reality that most income is tagged to specific projects, and is spent soon after.

Acknowledgements

Funders

Ministry for the Environment
Tindall Foundation,
Foundation North
Bobby Stafford-Bush
Foundation
Water Safety NZ
Department of Conservation
Whangārei District Council
Lotteries Community (national)
Skycity

Kaipara District Council
Fonterra
Lion Foundation
Auckland Council and local
boards
Tu Manawa Aktive Aotearoa
Fortuna Foundation
Wettie Wetsuits and
Spearfishing
Far North District Council

Northland Regional Council
Reeve Davies and Associates
NZAAE (Seaweed)
COMET
WWF
SouthSci and Whangārei
Underwater Club (dissolved)
Access to Experts (A2E)
Hauraki Gulf Forum

Regional Providers

EOS Ecology
He Awa Ora, He Tai Ora
Tairāwhiti Environment Centre
Sustainable Hawkes Bay
Tasman Bay Guardians
Friends of Te-Whanganui-o
Hei Marine Reserve Trust

Mountains to Sea Wellington
Ngā Motu Marine Reserve
Society
Te Kaahui o Rauru
Wild for Taranaki
Thriving Southland

Otago Catchment
Communities
Whanganui Region Catchment
Collective
Puketoi to the Pacific

Sponsors

MTF Finance Whangārei
The Chocolate Fish Co
2plus

Explore
Wettie
Dive! Tutukaka

Auckland Sea Kayaks
Wilderlab

Partners

Dive! Tutukaka
DOC Whangārei
DOC
Explore
Northland Community
Foundation
Auckland Council and local
boards

Wai Care
National Advisory Group for
Freshwater Citizen Science
Te Rangi i Taiāwhiaotia Trust
Fish Forever
Seaweed
Patuharakeke te Iwi Trust
Board

Whirinaki Trust
Ngāti Manu
Ngāti Kuri
Auckland Sea Kayaks
Kaipara Moana Remediation
NZ Landcare Trust
NZARM

Collaborators

EcoQuest
Te Aho Tū Roa
Enviroschools
Northland Regional Council
Whangārei District Council
Community Waitakere
Patuharakeke Te Iwi Trust Board
Ngāti Manu
Te Uri O Hau Environs
Tiaki Ngā Wai O Hokianga
NZ Landcare Trust
Reconnecting Northland
Papa Taiao Earthcare
Mahurangi Action Group
Fonterra
Forest Bridge Trust
NorthTec
Te Henga Connection
Snells Beach Residents and Ratepayers
Association
Sustainable Coastlines
Whangateau Harbourcare
NIWA
Whananaki Community Led Development
Group (Te Whana O Te Nanakia Trust)
Te Waiariki
Ngāti Korora
Ngāti Takapari Hapū Iwi Trust
Far North Surf Rescue
Goat Island Marine Discovery Centre

Ngāti Kahu Social Services
Pacific Coast Kayaks
TriOceans
Ngāti Kuri
New Zealand Underwater Association (NZUA)
Auckland Freediving Club
Auckland Sea Shuttles
Auckland University Dive Club
Auckland Zoo
Charlie's Birds
Dolphin Underwater Club
Friends of Te Auaunga (Oakley) Creek
Friends of the Farm
Kaipātiki Project
Long Bay Okura Great Parks Society
Mission Bay Watersports
Ngā Kaitiaki Hapori o Pourewa
Noises Trust
Pest Free Kaipātiki
Rotoroa Trust
SUP Waiheke
Tāwharanui Open Sanctuary - Society
Incorporated
Te Whau Pathway Trust
Urban Ark
Waiheke Marine Project
Waiheke Resources Trust
Whangateau Holiday Park
Matapouri Holiday Units
Schnappa Rock

I Have a Dream
Freedive Aotearoa
Me He Wai - Te Rarawa
Ngā Kaitiaki o Ngā Wai Māori
Dream Streams Ltd
MPI
NZARM
Traverse Environmental
Pupuke Songbird Project
Takapuna North Community Trust
MPI
Eastern Bays Songbird Trust
Chamberlain Park Conservation Group
Friends of Le Roys Bush
Te Kohuroa Rewilding
Ngāti Paoa Ki Waiheke
Blake NZ
Sir Peter Blake Outdoor Education Centre
Beautification Trust
Marine Invaders
Kawau Cruises
Shaun's WildLife
Young Ocean Explorers
Kelly Tarlton Marine
WildlifeSeaLife Trust
Restoring Takarunga Hauraki
Ngāti Rangī

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In memorium

Shane Nicholas (1978 - 2025) - *Original volunteer and MTSCT supporter, former Programme Coordinator and He Kakano Nursery Manager, husband to Samara, dad to Blaze, and longtime friend to many in the MTSCT whānau.*

Ben Knight (1974-2025) - *Passionate ocean defender, much-loved Mountains to Sea Wellington team member, EMR Coordinator, friend.*



MOUNTAINS TO SEA
CONSERVATION TRUST

