

Collective approaches to scaling ecosystem regeneration, by the Pathways to Ecosystem Regeneration team.

12pm, Thursday February 17

Collective approaches to ecosystem regeneration in Aotearoa New Zealand – Full report:

https://bioheritage.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/McFarlane-et-al-2021-CawRpt_3725_Bioheritage-report_Collective-action.pdf

Collective approaches to ecosystem regeneration in Aotearoa – summary:

https://bioheritage.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/McFarlane-et-al.-summary_final.pdf

Questions arising during the webinar question period:

1. *What difference can research on collectives make to protecting and improving Aotearoa's biological heritage?*

Previous research highlights the need to reduce ecological stressors and restore multiple ecological functions at landscape scales to reverse declines in biodiversity. Such large-scale, multifaceted efforts are typically beyond the scope of individual community groups, and require groups, iwi, hapū, landowners, government, NGOs, and industry bodies to undertake coordinated restoration. Collectives, which involve multiple community groups and other entities working together towards shared restoration goals, provide a pathway for scaling up restoration so that place-based efforts contribute to wider biodiversity improvements. However, there are many questions about how collectives should self-organise, act, and seek support. Research can help to identify what governance structures, practices, funding, and relationships will support collectives to be effective in different contexts. This study generated insights on the role and contribution of collectives to community-based restoration in Aotearoa, and the potential for different types of collectives to scale restoration to improve its social and ecological outcomes.

2. *With regard to governance of 'collectives' - did you explore the needs at a governance level that would be useful to help fill e.g. legal, H&S, conflict mgmt etc*

Our survey explored several dimensions of collective governance, including their legal status, use of guiding documents (e.g. plans) and written agreements, funding, and relationships to constituent groups and funding/support organisations. These findings, including governance needs or questions identified by collectives, are documented in the report. In general, we found that collectives' governance needs varied significantly with their role in community-based restoration and stage of development. For example, many newer collectives had questions about whether they should incorporate and what governance structure would suit them best, whereas more established collectives' governance needs focused on strategy development and financial arrangements (e.g. should they have a role in administering funds). Some collectives saw themselves as having a 'grass roots' role and did not aspire to more formalised governance.

3. *Did you identify the demographics of constituents and collectives? And is there a critical mass of young people to make them sustainable?*

Our survey did not include questions about the demographics of constituents and collectives, as we were focused on the structure and operations of collectives. Several participants raised concerns with the sustainability of their collective or constituent group

based on the small number and older demographic of volunteers, but we do not know how representative these concerns are. Further research could explore whether collectives assist in engaging a wider range of people in community-based ecosystem restoration.

4. *Do various groups feed into centralized databases?*

Some collectives have set up centralised systems for contributing groups or individuals to report activities and monitoring data, and have developed or are developing apps to support data collection and sharing. For example, the national collective we surveyed had developed databases to support communication with and information dissemination among groups, as well as collection and storage of monitoring data from groups. Participants also mentioned several nationwide initiatives to create centralised information management systems tailored to community conservation groups – see econet.nz, trap.nz.

5. *Are there shared criteria for describing ecosystem health and functionality?*

We asked participants about the scope of collectives' activities, their purpose, and their outcomes for biodiversity. In analysing responses to these questions, we observed significant variability in the way participants and collectives conceptualise and assess ecosystem health and functionality. This variability reflects differences in collectives' worldviews, motivations for restoration, expertise, the local social and ecological context, and the scale at which restoration is undertaken. For example, some collectives saw social and ecological wellbeing as interwoven, and sought improved outcomes for their land, water, and people. Other collectives described their purpose and outcomes in terms of actions (e.g. number of trees planted), demographics for particular valued species, ecological indicators (e.g. water quality), or sustaining valued relationships to nature (e.g. recreation).

6. *Currently PF2050 has the greatest airtime and has captured the imagination of the public. Do you think the work of collectives and constituents is transferable to things that are less sexy like weed management and eradication?*

Our research so far has highlighted that collectives can create the potential for expanded environmental consciousness and action. Several collectives surveyed started off with a focus on a single species (e.g. kiwi), or a particular type of restoration action (e.g. planting) and have significantly expanded the scope of their goals and activities over time. For example, a number of collectives now seek improved freshwater and biodiversity outcomes through their actions, rather than identifying as a catchment or predator control group. Initiatives like PF2050 have helped to create a receptive audience for ecological restoration projects, and it appears that there are opportunities for collectives and groups to engage this interest and direct it towards 'less sexy' environmental initiatives. Zealandia for example has used its platform to create high profile projects on moths, mistletoe, parasitic plants, and kākahi.

7. *How do the trends you identified from your survey compare with international trends in collective action for biodiversity?*

Our review of the international literature highlighted a focus on the role of large networks and collaborative initiatives in scaling ecosystem restoration. Compared to what we observed in our survey, it seemed that these international examples featured a greater emphasis on government and industry entities, who often initiated and governed the network/initiative. Many of these studies focused on how the networks/initiatives facilitated connections and coordination between formal entities (e.g. between local and regional governments) and related questions of network or collaborative governance. By comparison, in Aotearoa—

perhaps as a virtue of our smaller size—collectives are often smaller in scale and feature strong community leadership. Many survey participants noted the importance of strong social ties, shared visions, and frustration with existing governance arrangements as being key instigators of collective formation. In some cases, this translated into a disinclination to formalise the collective's structure and operations, with participants emphasising the need to maintain the grass-roots nature of the collective. Another key difference between our survey results and the collective approaches reported in the international literature was the prominence of Indigenous leadership and involvement in collective action for restoration in NZ. We identified five tangata whenua-led collectives in our survey, and many other collectives with strong iwi/hapū partnerships.

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