

Empowering Kaitiakitanga & Environmental Stewardship



Whakamana | Empower

We're striving to empower New Zealanders to demand and enact environmental stewardship and kaitiakitanga (guardianship).



This research is Active

Matua James Waiwai, Matua Kevin Prime and Matua Tohe Ashby in Northland forest. Image by Whaea Aroha Mead



He Pou

Pua te kōwhai ngawhā te kōrari

He tohu Kōanga

Tau mai e Tui ki tō kāpunipuni honihoni kohikohi

Hei oranga hei rongoa pania te kiri ki te kōwhai kura

Haurangi e Tui i te tākoha o te Atua

Rere atu hoki mai

Parea te ua ki te kōwhai kura

Ka whiti mai te rā e ...

The blossoming kōwhai and the bursting flowers of the harakeke

Sure signs of Spring

As the Tui flock to the kōwhai, nibbling and collecting, partaking in the nectar

Obtaining sustenance and wellbeing as they brush against the precious kōwhai

Tui becomes satiated and intoxicated on this treasured offering of the Atua

Flying away and returning

The precious kōwhai warding off the rain

Giving way to the shining sun ...

Overview Te Tirohanga Whānui

Unless New Zealanders are inspired to act and work together for a common goal, the response to our biological heritage crisis will be disjointed, ad-hoc, and potentially counter-productive.

Empowering New Zealanders to demand and enact environmental stewardship and kaitiakitanga requires understanding the underlying values and drivers that lead some people to actively protect our biological heritage. It also requires understanding feedbacks between people in the landscape – some of whom actively intervene on behalf of the environment – and the ecosystems in which they live.

Our research uses two frameworks to obtain this understanding: one based on psychology, economics, and the ethics of human behaviour and one based on understanding complex social-ecological systems.

Research Area Summary Te Whakarāpopototanga Kaupapa

Barriers to practicing environmental stewardship

Words hold power. But when words mean different things to different people, messages and intent may be lost in translation.

In this research area, we are working to understand the vocabulary of environmental stewardship, including the common term 'kaitiakitanga'. We are specifically focusing on identifying language that empowers mana whenua to demand and enact environmental stewardship in their rohe.

Our research team will also identify and measure the barriers that prevent people undertaking action to protect our biological heritage. Specifically, we are designing and conducting a nationally representative survey of requisite capabilities, opportunities, and motivations for undertaking action. Once the results of the survey have been analysed through geospatial and ethnographic lenses, we can explore the actions that could help bring down those barriers.

In addition, we will explore the 'levers' which may be activated to reduce barriers to action in different social-ecological systems through place-based case studies.

Social-ecological systems

Environmental stewardship is just one part of a much larger system of social-ecological interactions. Social-ecological system (SES) models can be used to help better understand complex, dynamic systems, but such models are exceedingly complex.

For example, each person thinks and acts differently when it comes to looking after te taiao depending on a range of external and internal factors. So how do we predict those actions on the environment and, ultimately, the effect they will have?

Our research team will provide guidance for improving the application of the models to environmental decision making and governance while paying particular attention to the balance of disciplinary perspectives within the models. Doing so will increase the practical application of SES models and

provide a useful and informative way to understand and manage social, ecological, and social-ecological factors and processes that shape the adaptive capacity and outcomes of environmental stewardship.

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