

OUR LAND  
AND WATER

Toitū te Whenua,  
Toiora te Wai



# Lessons from governing and managing community-led research

## Executive Summary

The Revitalise Te Taiao programme, a community-led research initiative, aimed to create lasting changes in land use, management, and market focus to regenerate the environment and communities. The programme conducted research to develop evidence-based examples of how agribusinesses and communities can revitalise te taiao. The impact was multifaceted, including community empowerment, economic and environmental benefits, knowledge sharing, and growth.

Despite its success, the programme faced challenges in upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles, integrating mātauranga Māori and science, and empowering community-led research.

The programme leadership developed lessons for other research organisations and funders. These recommendations are grouped under four themes:

1. **Te ao Māori:** The programme was rooted in te ao Māori and te taiao, emphasising interconnectedness and aiming for collective prosperity. It fostered a culture of trust, reflection, learning, and dialogue.
2. **People:** The programme highlighted the need for a diverse team with a range of skills, a commitment to interdependence, and culturally sensitive processes.
3. **Leadership:** The programme emphasised eco-centric leadership, prioritising collective goals, understanding one's relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, empowering mana whenua, and aligning practices with the vision.
4. **Project management:** The programme integrated cultural values and practices into project management, prioritising cultural responsibilities, and adopting a people-centred management style.

In summary, Revitalise Te Taiao was about more than environmental stewardship; it was about integrating knowledge from mātauranga Māori, agribusiness, community know-how, and contemporary science to create a collective responsibility for te taiao and take action that embodies our interdependence with each other and the natural world we are all a part of.

## Introduction

The Revitalise Te Taiao team were asked to outline how we completed our programme within the Transition Pathways Theme of Toitū te Whenua, Toiora te Wai (the Our Land and Water National Science Challenge). There was a sense among the funder and team that there was something special about the way the programme started and weaved its way to successful completion. This was compelling enough to warrant the pātai, 'How did they do it?'

This report addresses that question. We describe how we developed a programme with an initial working group project to co-design the elements of successful community-led research (phase one) that ultimately provided the basis for the phase two research programme, Revitalise Te Taiao. There was a range of people involved throughout, from researchers to dairy farmers, businesspeople, policy makers, and rangatahi.

The programme's success came down to four key themes: te ao Māori, people, leadership, and project management. These are outlined below, along with recommendations, to help future programmes deliver impact. These themes do not exist in isolation. They come together under the kaupapa and tikanga of the overall programme, which along with the desired outcomes are the foundational drivers. This approach brings to life the values of people within the programme so that their day-to-day work is authentic. The practicality of implementing this approach comes down to 'how you do it' and paying attention to the four themes to prevent people getting locked only into the mechanics of delivery, losing sight of the forest for the trees. The programme produced supportive frameworks like 'the eleven insights' and Taiao Manawa Ora to guide understanding and positionality so people could work together on the tasks ahead.

To gain the most value and understanding from our recommendations, we suggest discussing the recommendations kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) before starting a programme or project. It's not just about reading our words. An element of Revitalise Te Taiao's success was dialogue and being ready to engage in meaningful conversations that challenged paradigms and fostered shared understanding. It may mean your organisation needs to modify its research culture, where the culture of the research changes over time with societal changes. This is an opportunity for the application of this document's recommendations to grow employees' wider understanding of te ao Māori and community.

Ngā mihi nui,

Simon Stokes, Richard Te Hurinui Jones, Renee Kahukura Iosefa, James Turner

Revitalise te Taiao Co-Leads

## What was Revitalise te Taiao?

Revitalise te Taiao was a community-led research programme that aimed to create enduring changes in land use, management, value chains, and market focus to regenerate the environment and communities that together are a part of te taiao. **Te Taiao** refers to the natural world and our eternal relationship with it. It's about understanding that we are part of an ecosystem and that our well-being is intrinsically linked to the health of the environment. Key aspects of the Revitalise te Taiao programme were:

- **Place-based pilots:** The programme conducted place-based research to develop inspiring evidence-based examples of how agribusinesses and communities can make changes to revitalise te taiao. Pilots in three locations, worked alongside mana whenua, agribusinesses, and communities to progress land-use change and connect with markets. These pilots were Ngā Kaiurungi Taiao, the leaders or navigators of the pathway forward for others to follow:
  - Taranaki-based “**Te Kāhui Rau**” led by ngā uri o Ngāti Tāwhirikura, revitalised hapū, whānau, and whenua, focusing on healing the land and the people from the intergenerational trauma of colonisation and land confiscations.
  - The Wānaka-based “**Knowledge into Action for Te Taiao**” project, led by WAI Wānaka, is expanding traditional farm plans to enhance the vitality of te taiao.
  - Bay of Plenty and Waikato-based “**Rere ki Uta, Rere ki Tai**”, guided by AgriSea, is testing regenerative farming methods on ten dairy farms to enhance the mana and mauri of the soil. It represents a collaboration of agribusiness entrepreneurs and innovators working side-by-side with scientists to revitalise te taiao.
- **Taiao Manawa Ora model:** This model guided the research, placing Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles (partnership, protection, participation) and the inter-relationship of values, knowledge, and worldviews of Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti at the centre to guide land stewards and agribusinesses from te taiao in thinking to te taiao in action.
- **Mātauranga-led, science-informed and te taiao-inspired:** The programme was led by mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and informed by science, to understand the opportunities identified when beginning with te taiao as the foundation.
- **Collaboration:** Revitalise Te Taiao involved a range of collaborators, including AgriSea, Rautāpatu, WAI Wānaka, Māori and rural leaders, Lincoln University and AgResearch.

## How was Revitalise Te Taiao organised?

The programme structure was inspired by the journeys of the great Polynesian navigators; waka cutting through the waters, a symbol of unity and purpose. At the helm were **Ngā Kaiurungi Taiao**, the visionary leaders steering towards a sustainable future. Paddling in harmony with them were **Ngā Kaihoe**, the support team<sup>1</sup> whose rhythmic strokes propel the waka forward on its journey.

This structure deliberately flipped the common hierarchical programme management structure, to one where the leadership sat alongside to enable and empower the pilot teams to set the direction. This meant, Ngā Kaihoe's role was:

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<sup>1</sup> Ngā Kaihoe was four in a shared co-leadership role, including communication and engagement, Te Ao Māori expertise, project manager, monitoring and evaluation, and research expertise

- **Creating space for community-led research:** Like skilled carvers who shape the waka, Ngā Kaihoe crafted a programme environment where the pilots thrived. They bridged the gap between Ngā Kaiurungi Taiao and stakeholders including funders (Toitū te Whenua, Toiora te Wai), ensuring respect for the Ngā Kaiurungi Taiao's vision while charting progress that resonated with the funder's expectations.
- **Navigating challenges:** When the waters got rough, Ngā Kaihoe were there to steady the waka. They continued to paddle the waka, whether it was project hurdles or personal storms, ensuring that the journey continued.
- **Cultural integration:** Ngā Kaihoe sought to weave the rich tapestry of cultural protocols into the fabric of the programme. They ensured that Revitalise te Taiao was not just a project but a cultural voyage that honoured and was framed in te ao Māori.
- **Strategic alliances:** Understanding that the journey is shared, Ngā Kaihoe forged alliances with other organisations and groups, such as the Ministry for Primary Industries Māori Agribusiness Extension team and Patagonia, that honoured the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. They built bridges, fostering unity and collective efforts that were essential for the well-being of te taiao.

## How was Revitalise te Taiao led and managed?

Based on our experience as Ngā Kaihoe, here are eight recommendations, under four themes (te ao Māori, people, leadership, project management), for research organisations and funders seeking to support successful community-led research.

### 1. Te Ao Māori

#### 1.1 Unity in diversity: Kaupapa Māori and te taiao for collective prosperity

Revitalise Te Taiao was deeply rooted in **te ao Māori** and **te taiao**, which emphasises the interconnectedness of people, their culture, and the natural world. The goal was to achieve a collective flourishing of both the environment and communities, recognising that individual success contributes to the success of the whole. The ambition of the programme was about:

- **Embracing kaupapa Māori.** Kaupapa Māori guided research and actions within a cultural context, ensuring that the values, worldview, and aspirations of Māori were at the forefront<sup>2</sup>. It was about being clear on the 'why' behind the research. This approach was not just about conducting research but about embedding oneself in the community and carrying their aspirations.
- **Ensuring that te taiao is at the heart of all actions.** Working for te taiao means actively contributing to the well-being of the natural world that we are all a part of.
- Balancing the need for scientific and programmatic success with the **responsibility to uphold the reputation and values of the communities** and organisations involved.
- Being driven by a strong **belief in the importance of the journey** and the cultural, community, and environmental outcomes we sought to achieve.

#### 1.2 Embracing te ao Māori: A journey of trust, learning, and interdependence

Revitalise te Taiao reflected a deep commitment to **te taiao**, **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**, and **te ao Māori**. These shaped the way forward, fostering a culture of learning where vulnerability and trust were supported. This was embodied in:

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.katoa.net.nz/kaupapa-maori>

- **Genuine commitment to te ao Māori**, including allocating time and resources for engagement through hui and wānanga held at marae and within te taiao.
- **Tangata Tiriti**: Embracing te ao Māori in day-to-day life means understanding what it means to be Tangata Tiriti—people who are part of Te Tiriti relationship. This involves integrating Māori perspectives and values into everyday practices, like project management, to empower mana whenua and communities to lead on their terms.
- **Community engagement**: Project conversations that extend into the local community and involve working alongside them outside of project participant’s own organisations. This helped ground the programme in the realities and aspirations of those communities. For example, a two-day wānanga on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, hosted by ngā uri o Ngāti Tawhirikura in Taranaki, the location of large-scale land confiscation and significant battles during the New Zealand Wars.
- **Self-reflection**: Recognising our collective interdependence within te taiao calls for self-reflection and a willingness to change both individually and collectively. It is about acknowledging the role our organisations play in addressing systemic issues, and the responsibility of Pākehā to educate themselves and critically reflect on their own indigeneity and inherited biases.
- **Dialogue and action**: Being ready to engage in meaningful conversations that challenge existing paradigms and foster a shared understanding and respect for te ao Māori.

In essence, Revitalise te Taiao was about more than just achieving research outcomes; it was about transforming the way we work, learn, and grow together, guided by the values and wisdom of te ao Māori and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is a journey towards a more inclusive, respectful, and interconnected future.

## 2. People

### 2.1 Collaborative synergy: Fostering a culture of interdependence and innovation

Involving a multiplicity of people in Revitalise te Taiao acknowledged the complexity of human dynamics in achieving a common goal. Key aspects were:

- **Multiplicity of skills**: Recognising that a diverse team requires a broad range of skills and resources, which are often underestimated.
- **No-egos**: Emphasising a commitment to **te taiao** and an ecosystem approach that values relationality and interdependence over individualism.
- **Leadership and learning**: Leading with clear objectives and maintaining an openness to learn and adapt throughout the project’s lifespan.
- **Technical and soft skills**: A balanced team with both technical expertise and soft skills, including visionaries who can imagine new possibilities, and communicators who can share the project’s narrative in an engaging manner.
- **Continuous practice**: The importance of practicing and refining these soft skills within the team to foster a supportive and collaborative environment.
- **Excellent project management**: The need for excellent project management skills that are people-focused and culturally sensitive, ensuring that processes and structures support **tikanga** and the project’s goals.

This holistic approach not only aims to achieve the project’s objectives but also nurtures the growth and development of the team and the community it serves. It’s about creating a culture where everyone is valued and empowered to contribute to the collective vision.

### 2.2 Whānau whakapakari: Cultivating a community

Expanding people's involvement in the project is centred on building a wider **whānau**—a family that extends beyond organisational boundaries. This is about creating a supportive network where people believe in and are committed to achieving a common goal, and where the funding and managing organisations reciprocate that belief and trust.

- **Co-leadership:** For large and complex programmes, co-leadership is essential. Leaders need to be skilled in navigating both te ao Māori and te ao Pākehā, bridging the two with experience and comfort.
- **Ecosystem leadership:** Recognising that leadership is part of an ecosystem means embracing humility, not being controlling, and empowering the team to share leadership responsibilities. The right person for the right role should lead at different times, based on their skills and the needs of the project.
- **Community integration:** The project should integrate roles such as connectors between **te ao Māori** and **te ao Pākehā**, intermediaries between communities and funders, communicators, project managers, kairangahau, researchers, and community leaders.
- **Teamwork and support:** Working as a team to fill gaps and understanding one's strengths includes reaching out for support when needed, such as legal and payroll assistance.

This approach fosters a culture of mutual respect, learning, and shared leadership, ensuring that the project is supported by a diverse and committed whānau. It's about nurturing a community that is collectively invested in the success of the project.

## 3. Leadership

### 3.1 Eco-centric leadership: Understanding positionality for collective growth

Understanding **positionality** is crucial in transitioning from an ego-centric approach to an eco-centric approach. This shift requires an open-minded and heartfelt approach to collaboration, where outcomes are co-created and may evolve over time.

- **Negotiating positionality:** It's essential to negotiate one's space and role within the project, prioritising collective goals over individual key performance indicators (KPIs).
- **Te Tiriti and personal identity:** Questions about identity, purpose, relationships, and the connection to **te taiao** are fundamental. This includes understanding one's position in relation to **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**. **Wānanga** are vital for building critical awareness of one's position and interdependencies as a part of te taiao. Regular engagement in these conversations is important, and they should be budgeted for alongside research work.
- **Mana whenua:** The indigenous people or local inhabitants have the right to have their questions answered and to choose whether or not to partner on a project. Project documents should reflect the relationship of **mana whenua** to the **whenua** and the **kaupapa**.
- **Whakawhanaungatanga:** This refers to the process of establishing relationships, understanding connections, and building a sense of family or community.
- **Co-design and mana:** In a co-design process, it's necessary to relinquish control and prioritise the aspirations of the community over individual and organisational goals. This involves empowering **mana whenua** to lead.
- **Principles in practice:** Reflecting on the principles behind actions, such as the 'why' of the kaupapa, helps ensure that practices align with values and the overarching vision.

By focusing on these aspects, organisations can foster a culture of mutual respect, shared leadership, and a deep connection to te taiao, ultimately leading to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

### 3.2 Fostering Trust: Nurturing funder confidence through engagement

To grow and maintain the confidence and support of a funder, it's essential to demonstrate leadership that not only embodies eco-centric and inclusive values but also excels in the practical aspects of project management.

- **Effective leadership:** Leaders should exhibit the characteristics of eco-centric leadership, such as inclusivity, cultural awareness, and holistic thinking, while also being adept at the practical “nuts and bolts” of project management.
- **Regular communication:** Building trust with funders through consistent and regular communication, providing updates, and being transparent about the project's progress and challenges.
- **Funder involvement:** Encourage the participation of funders in the project by inviting them to join hui and wānanga. This helps them connect with the emotional and relational aspects of the project, deepening their understanding and commitment.

By integrating these elements, you can foster a relationship with funders that is built on mutual respect, shared values, and a clear demonstration of capability and progress.

## 4. Project management

### 4.1 Culturalisation of project management: Embracing te ao Māori principles

The culturalisation of project management within **te ao Māori** is a holistic approach that integrates cultural values and practices into the management process. It's about prioritising cultural responsibilities such as **tangihanga** and **manaakitanga** alongside the work. Ways this can be reflected in project management include:

- **Cultural understanding:** Project managers and administrators are expected to have a deep understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its implications for project management.
- **Inclusivity:** Including the project manager as a member of the whānau, and budgeting for everyone's time and expenses to participate in the project effectively.
- **People-centred management:** Emphasising a project management style that is centred around people, their needs, and their well-being.
- **Navigating administrative systems:** A project manager who is committed to finding ways through organisational systems to support and care for everyone involved.
- **Contracting skills:** Having someone with strong contracting skills who can negotiate fair terms that reflect a true partnership rather than a transactional relationship.
- **Adaptive processes:** Showing a willingness to adapt processes and templates to meet the needs of the communities and the contracting organisation, fostering a partnership rather than a one-sided transactional relationship.
- **Outcome-focused reporting:** Shifting the focus from mere activities and outputs to the 'why' behind them, ensuring that the outcomes align with the project's goals, and reporting on progress toward these outcomes.

This approach ensures that the project not only achieves its goals but also nurtures the relationships and cultural values that are integral to **te ao Māori**.

### 4.2 Navigating the currents: Upholding the kaupapa amidst challenges

Navigating through challenges and disagreements is an inevitable part of any collaborative effort, especially when it involves a deep commitment to cultural values and principles. This requires:



- **Steadfast commitment:** It's crucial to stay engaged in the conversation and navigate through difficulties without compromising on the project purpose. Clarity on non-negotiable values and principles is essential.
- **Guided by tikanga:** Tikanga and a passion for the kaupapa provide guidance. Embracing **te ao Māori** ensures that the focus remains on cultural practices and **manaakitanga**. Taiao Manawa Ora was the central guide for Revitalise te Taiao.
- **Cultural practices:** Incorporating **karakia** to open and close meetings, and **mihi** to everyone, reinforces our interdependence within the project and te taiao.
- **Solution-focused team:** Having a team that is both solutions-focused and emotionally connected to the project brings the energy needed to work through challenges. This includes supporting each other through difficult times, adhering to tikanga, and establishing a safe and inclusive space from the outset.

This approach fosters a resilient and supportive environment where cultural values are upheld, and challenges are met with collective strength and unity.

In summary, Revitalise Te Taiao is about more than just environmental stewardship; it's about weaving together knowledge from mātauranga Māori, agribusiness, community know-how, and contemporary science to create a collective responsibility for te taiao and take action that embodies our interdependence with each other and the natural world we are all a part of.

## Impacts of Revitalise Te Taiao

The impact of the **Revitalise Te Taiao** programme on local communities has been profound and multifaceted:

- **Community empowerment:** The programme has empowered communities by valuing local knowledge and fostering trusted relationships among councils, research organisations, universities, and landowners. This collaborative approach has led to the creation of local solutions for local issues.
- **Economic and environmental benefits:** By working alongside agribusinesses and communities, the programme has facilitated progress toward enduring changes in land use, management, value chains, and market focus. This has not only revitalised te taiao but also supported sustainable economic growth.
- **Cultural integration:** Revitalise Te Taiao has embraced the diversity of knowledge and ways of knowing within different worldviews. It is a mātauranga-led, science-informed, and te taiao-inspired research programme that respectfully incorporates te reo Māori and its values in communication and engagement.
- **Knowledge sharing:** The programme has highlighted inspiring and practical examples of communities and agribusinesses moving along the pathway to revitalise te taiao. The research provides evidence to guide actions that enable other communities and agribusinesses to embark on a similar journey.
- **Reflection and growth:** The mid-point reflections of the programme gathered people from across the place-based pilots to review and focus on future plans. This has helped weave together mātauranga Māori and science to ensure that the connection to te taiao, people, and community remains at the heart of the initiative.

Overall, Revitalise Te Taiao has had a significant impact on local communities by integrating traditional knowledge with science, enhancing environmental stewardship, and promoting economic resilience while upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

# Revitalise te Taiao project timeline

