



\$1.2 billion for nature: What Jobs for Nature delivered

Summary of findings of the J4N independent evaluation

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MAIN MESSAGES

The Jobs for Nature (J4N) programme was an effective intervention that successfully delivered employment when it was needed while establishing strong foundations for enduring environmental benefits



The programme delivered significant employment and environmental benefits

The programme exceeded its employment targets and delivered environmental restoration activities at scale. While full environmental outcomes will take years to materialise, the programme's focus on scientifically supported conservation practices provides strong foundations for significant future benefits

Meaningful Māori partnerships delivered transformative outcomes but varied in quality

Many Māori communities described the programme as transformative, enabling essential work on their whenua and opportunities to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. However, some felt partnerships with agencies were "one-sided", highlighting the need for genuine power-sharing and adequate engagement processes.

Programme flexibility enabled adaptation to changing circumstances

The programme successfully adapted from an immediate COVID response to greater emphasis on environmental outcomes and building environmental and conservation capacity. This flexibility proved valuable in meeting evolving needs while maintaining core objectives.

The programme demonstrated additionality beyond its financial investment

The programme accelerated conservation work beyond normal funding mechanisms, converting environmental priorities into active projects at scale and pace. It also generated spillover benefits, including enhanced emergency response capacity and innovative conservation approaches.

National coherence was strong but regional coordination varied significantly

The programme aligned well with national environmental strategies and avoided duplication with other initiatives. However, regional coordination varied considerably, with some areas achieving strong coordination through existing frameworks while others experienced weaker coordination.

Sustainability foundations are solid

The programme's focus on scientifically supported conservation practices provides confidence in long-term environmental benefits, and many participants transitioned to permanent employment. However, historic underfunding of conservation work risks undermining the progress achieved during the programme.

Key insights and evaluative judgements

This report presents a summary of findings from an independent evaluation of the J4N programme. The evaluation sought to understand how effectively the programme has been implemented and the extent to which it is on track to deliver its intended outcomes for participants and the environment. The evaluation framed its investigation of the programme under six key criteria: effectiveness, relevance, coherence, additionality, sustainability and learning and improvement.

The three-year evaluation conducted extensive qualitative research through regional and thematic case studies. In total, this involved 150 interviews with project stakeholders, iwi representatives, and government officials. The summary also draws on the findings of a dedicated Te Ao Māori evaluation, which assessed the programme through a Māori lens using Critical Tiriti Analysis and Te Whare Tapa Whā frameworks. Quantitative analysis examined administrative data from J4N projects to assess programme outputs and investment distribution.

Principal findings from the evaluation, and overall judgements against the first five evaluation criteria, are provided below. The sixth criterion of 'learning and improvement' is a descriptive criterion, which captures lessons and insights from programme implementation rather than providing an evaluative judgment. These lessons are provided in the 'learnings and implications' section below.

Principal findings

Effectiveness

The J4N programme was highly effective in creating employment opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery period. **By December 2024, the programme had exceeded its objective of 12,000 employment opportunities, providing over 15,500 people with jobs and delivering over 12.5 million hours of work.** This substantial impact on local economies was achieved through direct economic stimulation via wages, equipment expenditure, and services. The provision of stable, meaningful, and adequately paid employment led to increased economic stability, the ability to remain in the community, and greater overall wellbeing in whānau and communities.

Determining the effectiveness of the J4N programme in creating environmental impacts is challenging, as the outcomes of restoration activities will take time to fully realise. However, the programme has delivered substantial environmental outputs including the remediation of fish passages and extensive planting and pest control activities. While full environmental outcomes will take years to materialise, the scale and scientific basis of activities provide strong foundations for significant future benefits. Anecdotal evidence from project personnel suggests increased biodiversity in treated areas, with reports of more birds, bats, and native plants.

From a Te Ao Māori perspective of effectiveness, the J4N programme provided the government with a mechanism to fulfil its Treaty of Waitangi obligations by working with Māori