

The Nature  
Conservancy  
Aotearoa New Zealand



# 2023 Impact Report

[nature.org/newzealand](https://nature.org/newzealand)

**Cover:** The Te Hoiere River catchment in Marlborough is an important project area for the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance. © iStock

**This page:** A small waterfall in the North Island's Waipoua forest. © Alexis Geslin / TNC Photo Contest 2023

# Introduction

Our vision since 2018 for Aotearoa New Zealand is present in this Māori whakataukī / proverb:

Toitū te marae a Tāne-mahuta,  
Toitū te marae a Tangaroa,  
Toitū te tangata.

*If the land is well and the sea is well, the people will thrive.*

Continuing this strong vision, The Nature Conservancy Aotearoa New Zealand (TNC NZ) combines the power of science and the wisdom of local partners to protect natural resources at scale.

# How We Make a DIFFERENCE

- ❖ Established kaupapa / principles and knowledge that are embedded in our partnerships and projects.
- ❖ Partnership with iwi / Māori tribal units and communities, as well as public and private sector organisations.
- ❖ Work closely with our international TNC arms, primarily in the Asia region, to align on goals and achievements.

## COUNTRY DIRECTOR

In 2023 we welcomed Abbie Reynolds as our new Country Director, taking over from Carl McGuinness as acting Chief Executive. We benefit from her wealth of knowledge across business and sustainability issues as well as her passion for bringing nature-based solutions to scale in Aotearoa.



**Clockwise from left:** Abbie Reynolds. © Lisa Duncan; Kelp swirling along the shoreline at Nugget Point in the Catlins. © Stuart Atwood Photography; An endangered bull New Zealand sea lion / pakake / whakahao. © Lauryn Wachs/TNC



Aotearoa New Zealand has unique ecosystems treasured by a highly aware and engaged population. We can achieve a great deal for nature and people by collaborating at a transformative scale with government, iwi and communities. We have the innovative tools and approaches to do this, and are building the movement we need to make it happen. We need your support to help Aotearoa thrive.

— **ABBIE REYNOLDS**  
TNC Aotearoa New Zealand  
Country Director



# Project Portfolio

OUR BASE: IMPACT AT SCALE AND TRANSFORMATIVE COLLABORATION

1

**KOTAHITANGA MŌ TE TAIAO ALLIANCE***Collaboration to protect and restore over 3 million hectares*

The Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance (KMTT; “collective action for our nature”) implements landscape-scale conservation projects with wider social, cultural and economic outcomes across Te Taihū and Kawatiri/Buller in the northern part of the South Island. Working to protect over 3 million hectares of land, freshwater and sea, KMTT includes the New Zealand Department of Conservation, Ministry for the Environment and Fisheries New Zealand alongside nine iwi and five local councils. Projects aligned with KMTT’s strategy and vision include catchment and wetland restoration from the coasts and sounds to the mountain tops, building habitat corridors and weed and pest-free halos across the landscape, and restoring the coastal and marine ecosystems. In 2023, KMTT was featured on [BBC Earth’s Our Frozen Planet](#).

2

**BLUE CARBON***Restoring coastal wetlands through carbon credits*

Aotearoa NZ has lost over 90 percent of its wetlands, including in coastal areas. Coastal wetlands such as mangroves, saltmarshes and seagrass meadows are now being recognised as potential carbon sinks, with added benefits for habitat restoration and biodiversity. TNC Aotearoa New Zealand is part of TNC’s Global Blue Carbon Programme, creating voluntary carbon and climate resilience credits from restoring these coastal habitats. Carbon credit revenue can, in turn, support future restoration and protection, making conservation sustainable and profitable for local communities. We are collecting data at seven Aotearoa NZ sites to help build the evidence base to bring blue carbon credits to market after 2025. The project will also provide educational resources and contribute to policy research.

3

**HAWKE’S BAY: LAND FOR LIFE***Demonstrating profitable, sustainable farming*

Land in the Hawke’s Bay agricultural region has experienced extreme stress from current land use as well as Cyclone Gabrielle in early 2023, exacerbating hill country erosion and sediment in the region’s waterways, affecting water quality and aquatic life and impacting the economic viability of farming communities. Tree planting on pastoral lands can stabilise soil, capture carbon, provide forestry revenue and support alternative sources of income like honey production and credits for carbon sequestration. This joint project with Hawke’s Bay Regional Council and the Ministry for Primary Industries supports farmers to engage in regenerative agricultural practices that reduce waterway pollution and fight climate change to build a sustainable future.

4

**CONSERVATION LEADERS***Building the capacity of the environmental sector*

With the help of our partners, TNC NZ is building the capacity of Aotearoa NZ’s conservation and natural resource management leaders to achieve even greater impact. We aim to train up to 180 conservation and natural resource management leaders from across the country in the internationally recognised Conservation Action Planning approach, as well as assisting up to 30 people to become qualified Conservation Coaches. These conservation leaders will be better equipped to deliver landscape-scale projects that achieve impacts at a level that affects whole ecosystems and will empower others to lead similar projects.

5

**RESTORING HAURAKI GULF: SHELLFISH RESTORATION***Over 370 tons of kūtai / mussels released into the Gulf to reestablish mussel beds and reefs*

Rebuilding the Hauraki Gulf’s mussel beds will boost the marine ecosystem. Shellfish play a key role in cleaning water; supplying food and habitat for fish, crabs and birds; and providing coastal protection against climate-related storm surges and rising seas. In partnership with iwi, University of Auckland and The Mussel Reef Restoration Trust, we have deployed over 370 tonnes of mussels into the gulf, and we are monitoring the survival and health of the restored reefs.

6

**PACIFIC ISLANDS COMMUNITY***Women-led conservation in Solomon Islands*

Aotearoa NZ is committed to being a good neighbour in the Pacific. Working with our Solomon Islands programme colleagues, we support local women’s collectives in Solomon Islands, alongside the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to establish and operate a community facility centred around the largest rookery of critically endangered hawksbill turtles in the southern hemisphere. We will continue to work with TNC’s Pacific Islands programme to identify further opportunities to help those communities protect the land and water on which all life depends.



For more on our projects, visit [nature.org/newzealand](https://nature.org/newzealand)

# Progress *to* 2030

TNC GLOBAL  
2030 GOALS

## CLIMATE



**3 billion**

METRIC TONS  
CO<sub>2</sub>E PER YEAR

of carbon  
emissions are  
avoided or  
sequestered

## LANDS



**650 million**

HECTARES

of critical  
landscapes are  
protected, restored  
or benefiting  
from improved  
management

## OCEANS



**4 billion**

HECTARES

of oceans are  
protected or  
benefiting  
from improved  
management

## FRESHWATER



**1 million**

KILOMETERS

of rivers are  
protected, restored  
or benefiting  
from improved  
management



**30 million**

HECTARES

of lakes and  
wetlands are  
protected, restored  
or benefiting  
from improved  
management

## PEOPLE



**45 million**

PEOPLE

are benefiting from  
improved rights to natural  
resource management  
and sustainable  
economic development  
opportunities

TNC AOTEAROA  
NEW ZEALAND

Reduce carbon emissions and increase resilience by supporting coastal wetland restoration through our Blue Carbon project.

Promote healthy land and waters with Hawke's Bay's Land for Life project, enabling profitable, sustainable farming and increasing resilience to climate change impacts.

Re-establish 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of kūtai / mussel beds in the Tikapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / Hauraki Gulf.

Promote healthy land and waters with Hawke's Bay's Land for Life project, enabling profitable, sustainable farming and increasing resilience to climate change impacts.

Support coastal wetland restoration through our Blue Carbon project.

Strengthen conservation planning with our qualified Conservation Leaders training.

Support local leaders in the Pacific Islands through a community environmental venture.

Support the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance ("Working as one for our environment") to work on restoration projects on over 3 million hectares across land, rivers and sea.

# Our 2023 ACHIEVEMENTS

As part of The Nature Conservancy worldwide, we bring global reach and access to innovative tools and funding.

Our key impact is to radically increase in scale projects that help people and nature thrive. For example, we are supporting the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance, a grouping of conservation initiatives across the top of the South Island, which aims to regenerate ecosystems across more than 3 million hectares of land and water, representing 10% of New Zealand's land area. To harness the potential impact of this scale, we are implementing a joined-up approach across all stakeholders to conservation issues, for example, management of invasive species such as feral goats or wilding conifers.

We encourage innovative planning approaches, such as the globally-recognised Conservation Standards, and finance mechanisms such as impact investment and new markets. We work with project partners to help them strengthen their case for investment and to be ready to act when investment is available. Our ultimate goal is to help our partners set up for success by helping to build their capability and resources.



**Clockwise from left:** Tribal Creek Falls near the Franz Josef Glacier. © Stuart Atwood Photography; Kawakawa and fern leaves. © Stuart Atwood Photography; Kākāriki / New Zealand parakeet. © Bernard Spragg

*We want to thank all our supporters and partners for making 2023 a successful year for The Nature Conservancy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our achievements would not be possible without you. We look forward to increasing our activity and engagement in 2024 to make a difference for people and nature.*



**Left to right:** KMTT Restoration by Design working group looking at opportunities for nature-based solutions to climate flooding within KMTT. © Erik van Eyndhoven/TNC; Toutouwai / North Island robin. © Stuart Attwood Photography

# SYSTEM CHANGE

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## Building our te ao Māori capability

We aspire to support best practice for applying te ao Māori / Māori world views for te taiao / the natural world solutions, and partner effectively with Māori. We have appointed a Te Ao Māori Advisor who works across TNC NZ and the Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance. Aneika Young joined us in September 2023, and brings almost 10 years of experience as an environmental cultural consultant, most recently with the Cawthron Institute and Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Rārua.

## Recognising traditional knowledge

We help foster cultural connections between different countries, including planning for a visit in 2024 from the Homalco First Nation government in Canada. In 2023, we supported the Revive Our Gulf team and iwi members to attend the Australian Coastal Restoration Network Conference in Australia to build their knowledge.

We also supported our Te Ao Māori Advisor to attend the World Conference on Ecological Restoration, presenting about KMTT alongside other indigenous conservation work.

## Promoting policy development

Drawing on our global network of experts, we made a submission supporting the development of biodiversity credits to the Ministry for the Environment's consultation [Helping nature and people thrive – Exploring a biodiversity credit system for Aotearoa New Zealand](#). We support the need to incentivise landholders to protect and restore native vegetation, threatened species habitat and other natural values.





# »» INTO Action »»»»»»»»»»

Conservation highlights from 2023

Deploying kūtai / mussels back into the Hauraki Gulf to restore its mauri / lifeforce.  
© Shaun Lee

# Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance

We developed an implementation pathway plan using recognised frameworks. The plan has now been approved and is ready for implementation.

## BY THE NUMBERS



17 partners – 9 iwi, 5 councils and 3 government departments.



22 projects over 3.4 million hectares across land, freshwater and sea.



Over 17,000 hectares of strategic weed control.



Over 100,000 riparian and wetland plants planted.



Pilot for biocontrol of invasive wasps underway.



Nearly 100 full-time-equivalent jobs.



Over 6,000 young people attended training/education programmes.




Undertaking a Reforestation Accelerator Programme in partnership with TNC Asia Pacific region.



## THE TNC DIFFERENCE

TNC has brought the partners together to develop the implementation pathway plan that will help deliver on the strategy. The Restoration by Design process drew on Conservation Standards and the Conservation by Design 2.0 framework, and contributed to a strong, integrated, operational plan across all partners.

TNC brought additional funding to Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance (KMTT) to enable financial support for iwi participation, scoping reforestation projects, increasing restoration work, supporting community planning activities and piloting wasp control.

 [Read more about KMTT's achievements](#)

**Above:** Piwakawaka / fantail.  
© Bernard Spragg

“

We have been told that the scale of investment to tackle these challenges is so significant that there simply isn't the scale of programmes available to meet it. This is where the operational planning, or Restoration by Design as we call it, positions the Top of the South and Kawatiri area to provide optimal delivery programmes to respond to this demand over 3 million hectares. Led by The Nature Conservancy, with exceptional support from a diverse, talented and committed number of organisations and individuals, this planning has enabled us to map out the priority work needed to achieve the nature-positive outcomes in our strategy.

— **HEMI SUNDGREN AND  
MARTIN RODD**

Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance  
Co-Chairs

# Blue Carbon & Coastal Wetlands

Our aim is to create sustainable financing to restore these precious ecosystems. Blue carbon credits could be one mechanism.

Following the pre-feasibility study in 2022, data collection and policy research is underway to support the case for a blue carbon credit market in New Zealand.



## BY THE NUMBERS



Data collection is happening at seven sites over 350 ha across Aotearoa NZ.



Two sites are within the KMTT Alliance project area.



Iwi have led the way in highlighting the decades-long deterioration of our estuary. This partnership marks a crucial step towards understanding and harnessing the carbon sequestration potential of our coastal wetlands. By working together, we can make significant steps in environmental conservation and climate change mitigation.

— PROFESSOR KURA  
PAUL-BURKE

Project Lead for Te Wahapū o  
Waihi, Bay of Plenty

## THE TNC DIFFERENCE

We are leveraging off a global programme of work to accelerate New Zealand's understanding of the opportunity for blue carbon credits.

We support the integration of mātauranga Māori / traditional knowledge through our agreements with iwi / tribal groups.



[Learn more about our blue carbon work](#)

**Top to bottom:** Project group at Pukehina Marae where a pōwhiri / welcome was held to launch the blue carbon work in the Bay of Plenty. © Andy Belcher; Cutwater Road, where a new wetland will be developed between the Pongakawa River and Pukehina Canal, on the margins of the Waihi Estuary. © Andy Belcher



# Land for Life

Following testing on 12 farms, we've approved the next stage of building the Land for Life programme in Hawke's Bay, enabling increasing use of native reforestation in farm plans to increase biodiversity.

[Learn more about our Land for Life programme](#)

**Above:** Hill country in Hawke's Bay.  
© Carl McGuinness/TNC

## BY THE NUMBERS



250,000 hectares of hill country is at high risk of erosion.



6.8 million tonnes of sediment enter the region's waterways every year, affecting water quality and aquatic life.



12 farms were included in the initial pilot.



After the huge impact of Cyclone Gabrielle, Land for Life establishes another tool to help our farmers build climate resilience in our rural communities. This project brings together three parties with different strengths to benefit farmers in our region, and potentially across the motu (country).

— IAIN MAXWELL

Hawke's Bay Regional Council  
Group Manager – Integrated  
Catchment Management

## THE TNC DIFFERENCE

Each farm will have access to planning tools and regenerative agriculture strategies, which will deliver for biodiversity as well as reduce hazards like erosion and sediment, and help farmers thrive on their land.

NatureVest, TNC's Impact Investing and Sustainable Finance team, has contributed leading thinking about financing and delivery structures.



90 farms will be targeted in the next 2 years.



300 farms will ultimately receive detailed farm plans, and 300 more will have access to high-level plans.

# CONSERVATION *Leaders*

Following a successful 2022 course, the next workshop is planned for May 2024 with expert coaches Stuart Cowell and Philippa Walsh. The course will cover the 'Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation'.

## BY THE NUMBERS



30 attendees in 2022.



Target: 180 leaders trained.



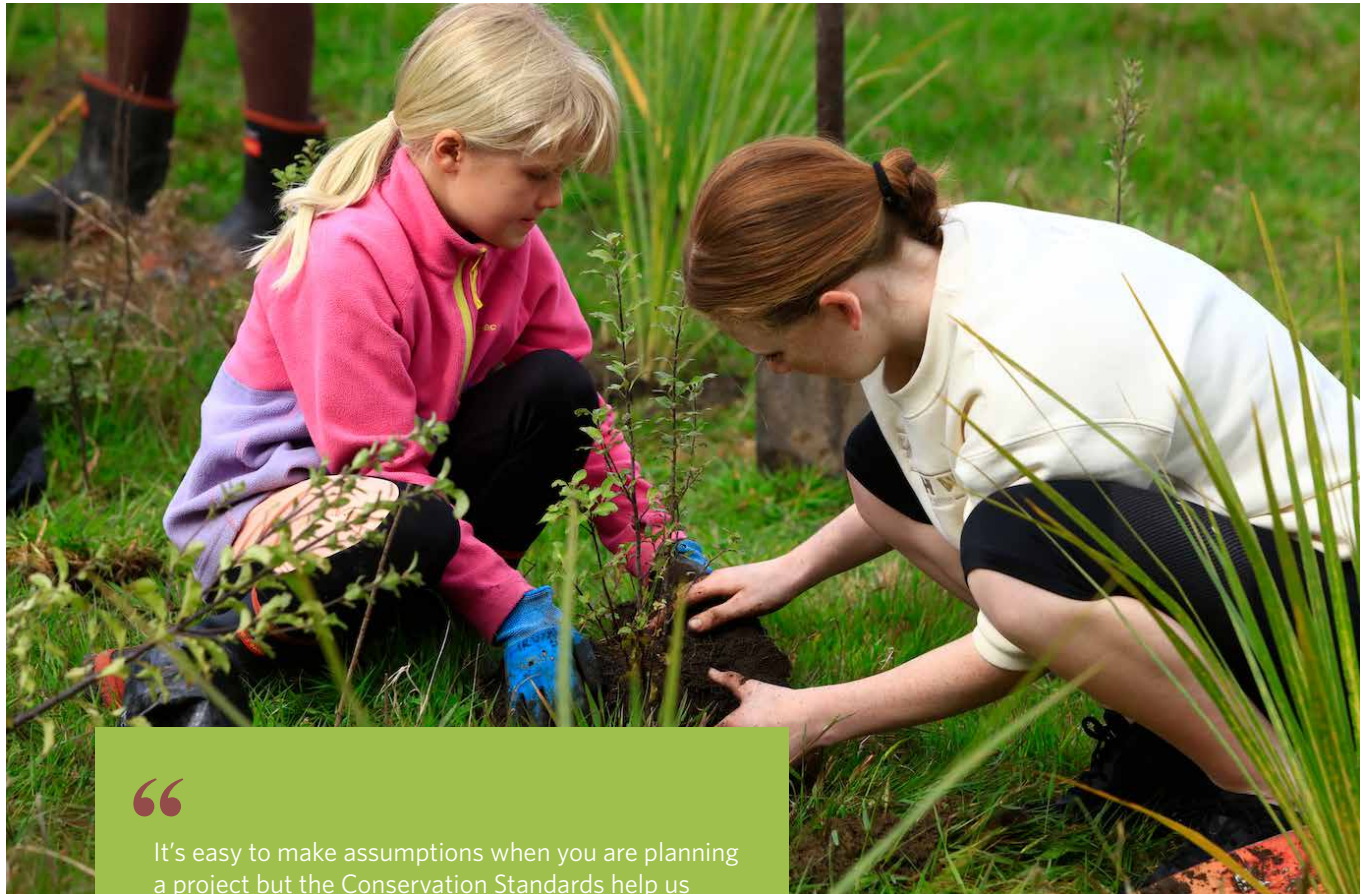
30 people trained as Conservation Coaches to provide further training.

## THE TNC DIFFERENCE

The programme encourages best practice conservation planning to help projects make the most of their funding and achieve maximum impact.

 [Learn more about Conservation Standards](#)

**Top to bottom:** Native planting for estuary restoration.  
© Kawatiri Nature Environment & Communities Trust;  
Southern Lakes Sanctuary training course. © Eryn Hooper/Department of Conservation



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It's easy to make assumptions when you are planning a project but the Conservation Standards help us look at potential upstream or downstream impacts we might not consider. The process helps us look at a project from multiple angles.

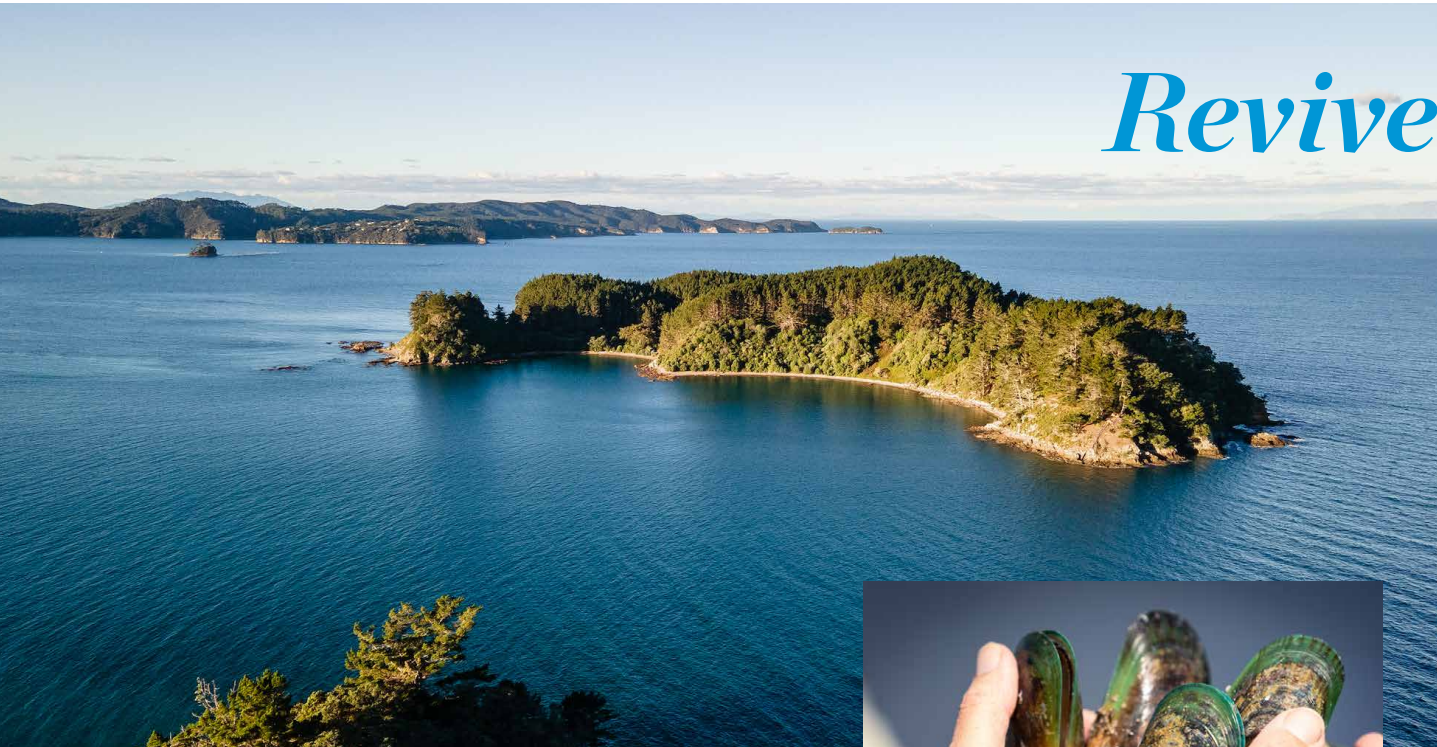
Using these tools has given us much more confidence that our assumptions are correct. These planning processes should also give funders more certainty about the outcomes.

— DI ROSSITER

Deputy Chair, Kawatiri Nature Environment & Communities Trust




# Revive Our Gulf



Revive Our Gulf is a collaborative project involving iwi/hapū, researchers and community. We are working together to support the longterm aspirational goal of restoring 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> of shellfish beds and reefs in Tikapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / the Hauraki Gulf.

The project is well underway with over 370 tonnes of new mussel beds reseeded.

 [Read more about our shellfish restoration work](#)



**Left:** Motuketekete Island in Tikapa Moana. © Gareth Book/Project Kahurangi; **Inset:** Kūtai. © Gareth Cooke/Project Kahurangi

## BY THE NUMBERS



Over 370 tonnes of kūtai / mussels have been reseeded in Tikapa Moana / Te Moananui-ā-Toi / the Hauraki Gulf, increasing resilience and restoring biodiversity.



We have raised \$1 million so far towards this work. Our Challenge Fund is open until March 2025, with Foundation North generously matching donations dollar for dollar.

## THE TNC DIFFERENCE

Drawing on our experience, we have contributed to engaging with our iwi partners and putting the project into operation, for example through coordinating deployments.

We have increased the fundraising capacity for this project and accelerated the fundraising efforts dramatically through the Challenge Fund initiative.



Experimental time frames are long, and it can take years to see results. We still have much to discover and learn about how to restore. For the first time in the history of this project, we have in place a regular monitoring programme. Over the past 18 months, eight compliance monitoring surveys and two additional surveys have significantly enriched our understanding.

— **KATINA CONOMOS**

Kaihautū / Programme Director,  
Mussel Reef Restoration Trust



# ARNAVON ISLANDS Community Centre

**Left:** Aerial views of Sikopo, a small island in the Arnavon Islands of the Solomon Islands. © Robert Taupongi;  
**Below:** Local rangers, including some of the first women rangers, collect eggs from an endangered leatherback turtle called Fari Kuti (“one nest together” locally) to ensure as many eggs hatch as possible. © Justine E. Hausheer/TNC

This project is in progress, with detailed design and build expected to start in 2024.

We are partnering with TNC Solomon Islands and contributing fundraising and knowledge. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is a significant contributor.

## THE TNC DIFFERENCE

Our role is to support conservation programmes within local communities. Building this facility will help strengthen local conservation initiatives.





## HOW YOU CAN HELP TNC'S PROGRESS

For more information on The Nature Conservancy's Aotearoa New Zealand programme, and how your support can make a real difference, please contact:

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