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Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy Phase 2 Engagement Feedback May to July 2026

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Acknowledgement

Waikato Regional Council is grateful to everyone who gave their time to join discussions and meetings, raise questions, and provide feedback on the draft regional biodiversity strategy through Phase 1 and 2.

The engagement and responses have been constructive and valuable. A wide range of perspectives ranging from tangata whenua, local councils, industry, conservation interests and statutory organisations contributed to this strategy.

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Executive summary

Phase 2 engagement on the draft Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy was undertaken from 29 May to 20 July 2026. A total of 187 responses were received, comprising 180 online survey responses and seven written submissions. Overall, respondents expressed strong support for the direction of the strategy, particularly its focus on ecological connectivity, landscape-scale restoration, community involvement and biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure. Feedback was generally constructive and focused on strengthening the strategy rather than changing its overall direction.

Analysis of the feedback identified ten recurring themes:

- **Clearer measures of success are needed**, including baseline information, measurable targets, interim milestones, monitoring and reporting.
- **Action needs to happen sooner**, with stronger short- and medium-term priorities and earlier implementation of key biodiversity actions.
- **Restoration should be balanced with protection and maintenance**, ensuring healthy ecosystems and existing biodiversity values are not overlooked.
- **The strategy should aspire to biodiversity recovery and gain**, rather than relying solely on concepts such as “no net loss”.
- **More funding, incentives and long-term investment are needed** to support biodiversity outcomes.
- **Existing community groups, volunteers, iwi/hapū and landowners should be better supported and recognised** for the work already being undertaken.
- **Pest plants, pest animals and biosecurity threats require stronger emphasis**, particularly environmental weeds, predators and pathway management.
- **Landscape-scale restoration and ecological connectivity should remain central**, including greater recognition of urban, coastal, freshwater and smaller habitat areas.
- **Views differed on Māori leadership, Treaty partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga**, although many respondents supported bringing together different knowledge systems and perspectives.
- **The strategy should remain flexible and durable** in the face of legislative reform, policy change and potential local government restructuring.

In response, a range of amendments have been made to strengthen monitoring and accountability, increase the emphasis on early action, improve the balance between protection and restoration, strengthen the focus on biodiversity recovery and gain, improve support for community-led action, increase the prominence of pest and weed management, reinforce ecological connectivity, refine references to Māori partnerships and mātauranga Māori, and clarify implementation and governance arrangements. Together, these changes strengthen the strategy while retaining its role as a high-level, long-term framework for biodiversity across the Waikato region.

1 Background

Biodiversity is the variety of life that supports the health and resilience of the Waikato region. It includes indigenous plants, animals and ecosystems, and the connections between them. Healthy ecosystems provide benefits that people depend on, including clean water, productive soils, climate resilience and cultural wellbeing. In te ao Māori, biodiversity is closely connected to *whakapapa*, reflecting the relationship between people and the natural world and the responsibility to care for *te taiao* for future generations.

Indigenous biodiversity in the Waikato region is under significant pressure. Native habitats and ecosystems have been reduced and modified over time, particularly in lowland environments, while many indigenous species are now Threatened or At Risk. Remaining forests, wetlands, rivers, estuaries and coastal ecosystems continue to face pressures from land-use change, invasive pests and weeds, habitat fragmentation and climate impacts. These challenges highlight the need for coordinated action to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity across the region.

WRC led the development of a Waikato Biodiversity Accord in 2024, to bring together organisations with the common goal of creating and putting into action a regional biodiversity strategy that seeks to protect and restore our unique native plants and animals and the ecosystems in which they live.

The Accord can be found here. It is a living document that organisations can sign up to at any time.

The biodiversity strategy is the next step on from the Accord and will be the first of its kind for the region. It is non-statutory, aiming to align and build on biodiversity-related mahi already underway. It will recognise the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and align with community aspirations and tangata whenua values, in support of thriving biodiversity across the region.

In September 2025 a discussion document, *Te reo o te taiao - A call from nature: Developing a biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region*, was prepared and released to key stakeholders, iwi and community organisations. This signalled the start of Phase 1 engagement for the strategy. A comprehensive engagement programme was undertaken during October and November 2025, including workshops and meetings with representatives from territorial authorities, iwi, central government agencies, NGOs, industry groups and community organisations. This engagement used the discussion document as a basis to test aspirations, challenges, opportunities and priorities for biodiversity restoration across the region. Engagement insights were complemented by analysis of iwi environmental management plans, existing strategies, state of the environment information and national direction. Phase 1 concluded with the preparation of a draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of document

Phase 2 engagement comprised public consultation on the draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

This report presents a summary of the feedback received in Phase 2, and the recommended changes to the draft biodiversity strategy resulting from the feedback received.

The updated strategy and supporting documents can be accessed online at the Waikato Regional Council's website.

2.2 How to read the report

This report summarises the feedback received through Phase 2 engagement on the draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy and explains how that feedback has informed recommended changes to the strategy.

The report is structured in two main parts.

The first part – What we heard – summarises feedback received through the consultation survey and emailed submissions. Feedback is presented according to the structure of the draft strategy:

- **Questions 1–15 – Outcomes:** summarises the level of support for each of the five proposed outcomes and the main matters raised by respondents.
- **Questions 16–27 – Pou:** summarises feedback on the four pou and their associated strategic focus areas.
- **Question 28 – General comments:** brings together additional matters raised through the open-ended survey question, including issues that cut across multiple parts of the Strategy.

The charts in these sections show the responses to the relevant survey questions. The accompanying text summarises the substantive matters raised in written feedback. As respondents could choose which questions to answer, the number of responses varies between questions.

The second part – Key feedback themes and implications for strategy amendments – draws together the most common and recurring themes identified across the engagement.

For each theme, the report sets out:

- **What we heard** – the key issues, concerns and suggestions raised through engagement.
- **WRC response** – Waikato Regional Council's consideration of the feedback and how it relates to the intended role and scope of the strategy.
- **Recommended changes to the strategy** – amendments or areas for refinement arising from the feedback.

The content in this report is intended to represent the main matters raised across the engagement rather than every individual comment or the views of any single respondent or organisation. Where respondents expressed differing perspectives, these have been identified so that the range of views received is appropriately reflected.

This report should therefore be read as both a record of the Phase 2 engagement and an explanation of how the feedback has been considered in refining the Regional Biodiversity Strategy.

3 Engagement Method

3.1 Phase 2 consultation process

The Phase 2 engagement for the draft biodiversity strategy ran for six weeks from 29 May to 20 July 2026. The draft strategy, supporting documents and a consultation survey were made available to the public on the Waikato Regional Council website through an Engagement HQ platform. Supporting documents included:

- Te reo o te taiao - A call from nature: Developing a biodiversity strategy for the Waikato region (Phase 1 discussion document)
- Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy Feedback Summary Phase 1 workshops PS26-05
- National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity 2023

An email was sent on 29 May 2026 to 200 individuals (representing 107 organisations) on the strategy engagement database list, inviting them to submit their views using the survey available on Council's strategy webpage. A follow-up email was sent on 6 July 2026.

Respondents also had the opportunity to write a freeform response and email them to the consultation inbox. These responses therefore did not necessarily follow the structured questions posed in the discussion document and were not anonymous.

The draft strategy and survey link were promoted through Council's social media channels, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Antenno platforms.

3.2 Survey structure and responses

Respondents using the online survey could respond to a total of 28 questions, with the option of answering all or some of the questions. The survey was structured around the Outcomes, Pou and Strategic Focus Areas in the draft strategy, with an open-ended question at the end. Respondents could add written feedback or provide additional supporting information. All survey responses were anonymous, although some respondents did identify themselves in their feedback.

Many respondents provided detailed and considered feedback, often commenting on multiple sections of the strategy and suggesting specific changes to outcomes, strategic focus areas and implementation approaches. The quality and depth of many of the responses demonstrates a high level of interest in biodiversity issues across the region and a strong commitment to helping shape a practical and effective strategy.

In total 187 responses were received, with 180 via the webpage survey and 7 emailed responses.

3.3 Approach to analysis

All responses received were compiled into a database, to enable analysis of over 300 individual points of feedback provided by respondents.

The response points were reviewed and grouped according to the relevant survey questions. Responses were then further analysed to identify common matters emerging under each question. These matters are set out in the "what we heard" sections of this report.

Where responses related to the content of the Strategy, WRC staff considered and documented a response, including any resulting refinements to the strategy where appropriate. These responses and the associated changes are set out in "strategy amendments section" of this report.

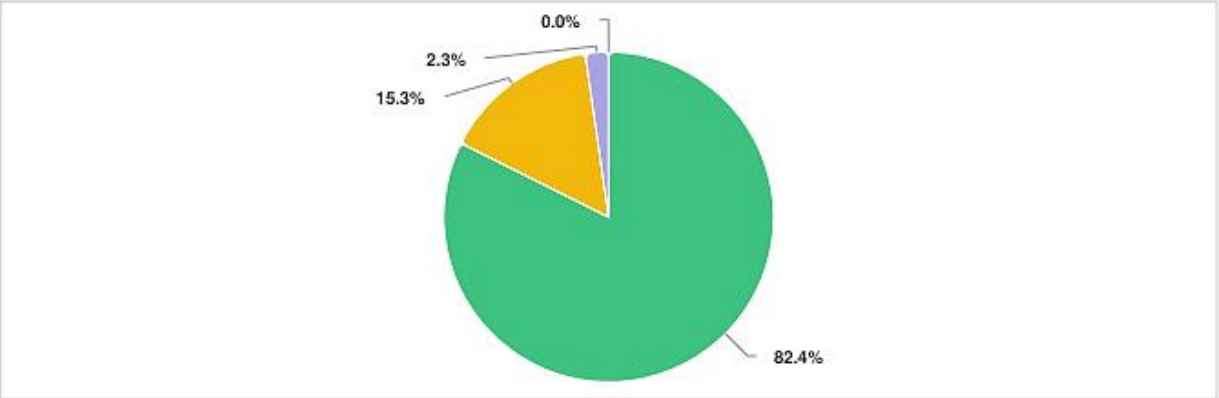
4 What we heard for Questions 1-15 - Outcomes

The first 15 questions in the survey asked respondents about each of the strategy's five outcomes in relation to:

- Whether the outcome should be included in the strategy - and if not, why not
- Suggestions on how the outcome should be rewritten.

Overall, there was a high level of support for the five Outcomes in the draft strategy. The feedback can be distilled into the following substantive matters under each outcome as follows:

Outcome 1: Ecosystems across the region flourish and expand, ki uta ki tai



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	145	82.4
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	27	15.3
Prefer not to answer	4	2.3
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	0	0.0

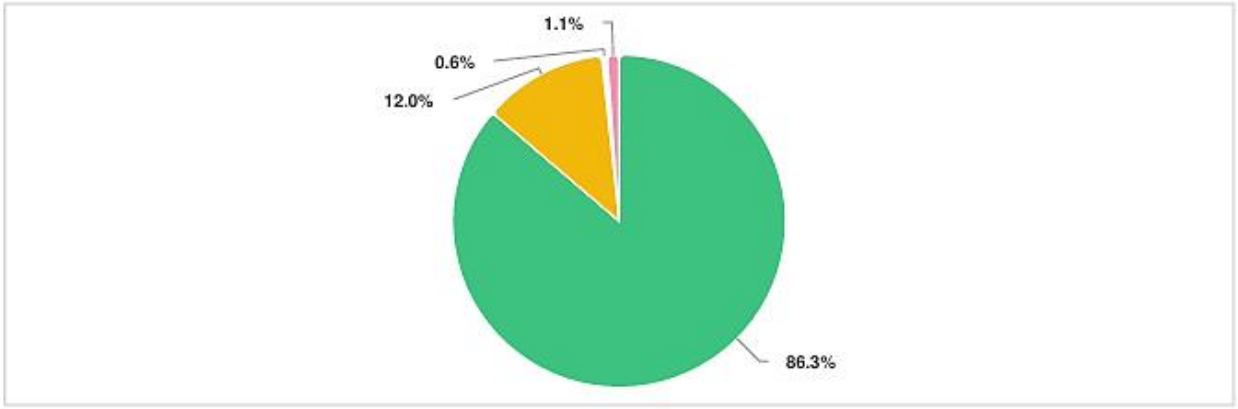
Optional question · 176 responses · 4 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Support prioritisation, but not at the expense of other ecosystems:** While respondents generally supported prioritising rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystems, many were concerned that healthy ecosystems, smaller remnants, roadside habitats and areas outside priority sites could be overlooked. There was a strong message that restoration should occur alongside protection and maintenance of existing biodiversity values.
- **Need for measurable outcomes and accountability:** Many respondents felt Outcome 1 was too aspirational and wanted clear baselines, quantified targets, indicators, milestones and regular reporting to demonstrate improvements in ecosystem extent, condition and connectivity.
- **Greater recognition of climate change and ecosystem resilience:** Respondents wanted a clearer description of what a healthy ecosystem looks like in a changing climate, including resilience, adaptive capacity and the ability to continue functioning despite climate-related pressures.
- **Maintain genetic diversity and ecological connectivity:** There was strong support for ecological corridors, protection of smaller habitat fragments, marine ecosystems and genetic diversity, with concerns that a focus on a "representative range" of ecosystems may not adequately protect the full gene pool of indigenous species.

- **Act sooner, not just by 2050:** A recurring theme was that 2050 is too distant and that biodiversity loss is occurring now, requiring earlier restoration efforts, interim milestones and more urgent action.

Outcome 2: Indigenous/taonga species and their habitats are recovering



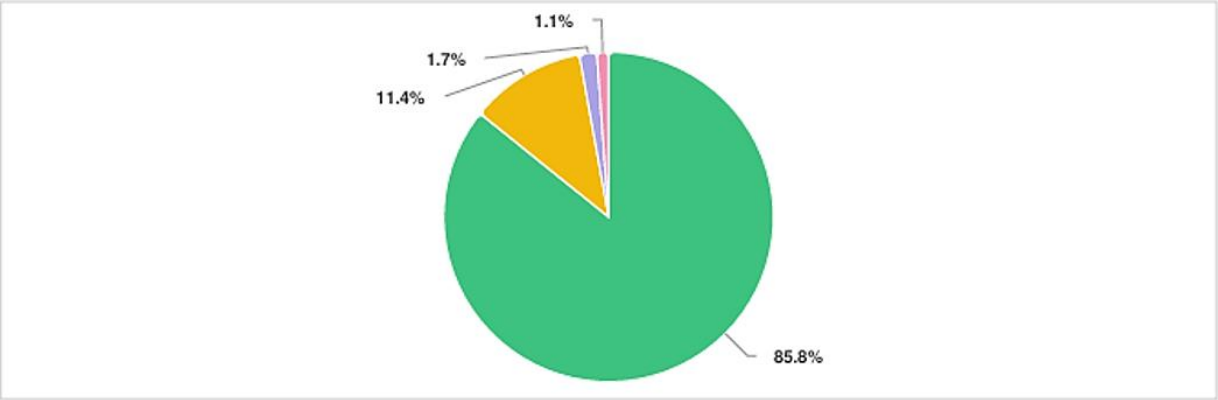
Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	151	86.3
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	21	12.0
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	1	0.6
Prefer not to answer	2	1.1

Optional question · 175 responses · 5 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Move beyond recovery towards preventing further loss:** Many responses wanted explicit commitments to no further species extinctions, no further decline of indigenous species, and active improvement in the status of Threatened and At-Risk species across the region.
- **Need measurable species-recovery targets:** There were numerous calls for the inclusion of measurable indicators such as population trends, threat-status improvements, habitat quality measures, fish passage targets and ecological connectivity indicators rather than relying on broad aspirational statements.
- **Connectivity is critical to species recovery:** Respondents strongly supported migration pathways, ecological corridors, habitat connectivity and landscape-scale restoration as essential to sustaining populations, maintaining genetic diversity and helping species adapt to environmental change.
- **Focus on pest management:** Many respondents highlighted the need for a more explicit commitment to controlling predators and pests, including rodents, stoats, possums and cats, as a key requirement for successful species recovery.
- **Species recovery needs to be more ambitious:** A recurring theme was that the wording "are recovering" lacks ambition and should instead reflect self-sustaining, increasing and resilient populations by 2050.

Outcome 3: Communities are informed, supported and motivated to restore and champion biodiversity



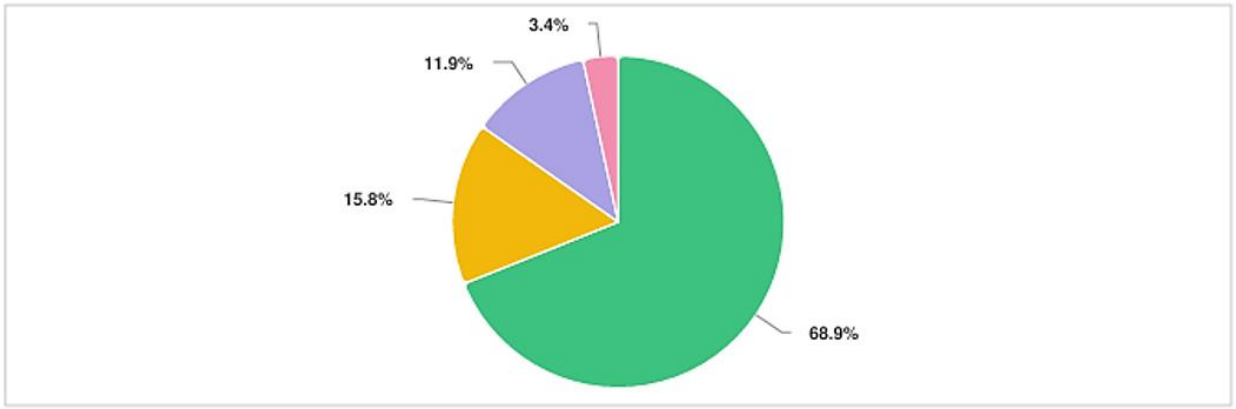
Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	151	85.8
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	20	11.4
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	3	1.7
Prefer not to answer	2	1.1

Optional question · 176 responses · 4 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Communities need practical support, not just encouragement:** Respondents strongly supported the outcome but argued that success will depend on funding, technical support, incentives, volunteer coordination, training and practical assistance rather than education and awareness alone.
- **Support existing community networks and volunteers:** There was strong recognition that many community groups, catchment groups, landowners and volunteers are already actively restoring biodiversity, and these existing networks should be strengthened rather than replaced by new structures.
- **Concerns about funding and reliance on goodwill:** Many felt the strategy asks communities to deliver biodiversity outcomes without clearly identifying long-term funding sources, support mechanisms or incentives. Several respondents warned against relying solely on goodwill to achieve outcomes.
- **Outcome should focus on the desired future state:** Some respondents considered parts of the outcome too focused on implementation mechanisms (e.g. funding and resources) and suggested focusing instead on what successful biodiversity stewardship will look like by 2050.
- **Need for earlier action:** Many respondents felt communities are already active and should not have to wait until 2050 to be informed, supported and motivated.

Outcome 4: Māori leadership, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga guide biodiversity restoration



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	122	68.9
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	28	15.8
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	21	11.9
Prefer not to answer	6	3.4

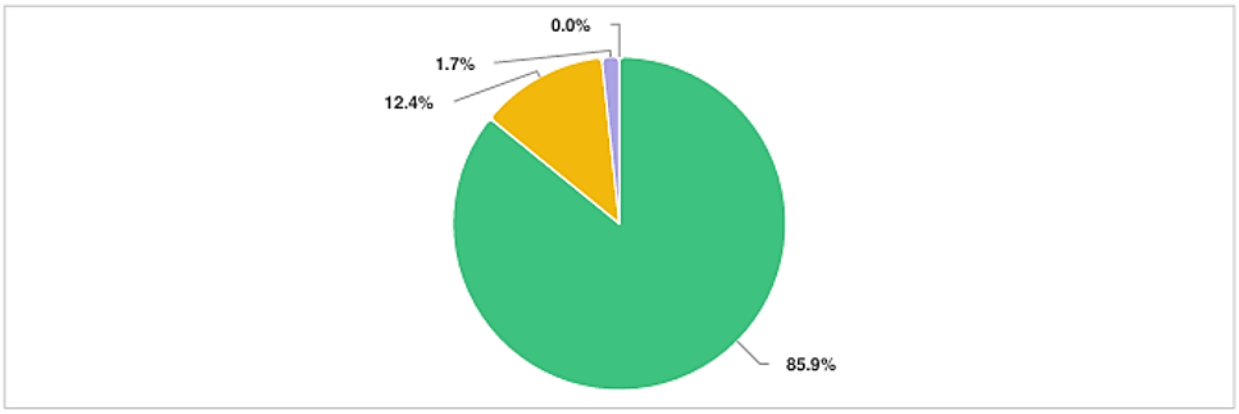
Optional question · 177 responses · 3 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Support for integrating multiple knowledge systems:** Even among differing views, many respondents supported combining mātauranga Māori with ecological science, monitoring, conservation biology and local environmental knowledge to strengthen biodiversity decision-making.
- **Need for greater clarity and inclusiveness:** Respondents sought clearer explanations of concepts such as customary practices, Māori-led monitoring, Māori land and kaitiakitanga, and wanted reassurance that all communities can participate in biodiversity restoration.
- **Recognition of Māori landowners and Māori organisations:** Some respondents sought stronger acknowledgement of Māori private landowners and their role in biodiversity protection, restoration and partnership arrangements.
- **Customary practices should support biodiversity outcomes:** Many responses focused on ensuring customary practices are interpreted and applied in ways that support biodiversity restoration and species recovery.
- **Divided views on Māori leadership:** This outcome attracted a wide range of views across the responses. Some respondents strongly supported Treaty partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga, while many others considered biodiversity restoration should be framed more as a shared community responsibility.

Outcome 5: People and nature prosper together in the Waikato region

Q13. Do you agree that Outcome #5 should be included in the strategy?



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	152	85.9
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	22	12.4
Prefer not to answer	3	1.7
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	0	0.0

Optional question · 177 responses · 3 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Strong support for biodiversity as natural infrastructure:** Respondents widely supported the concept that biodiversity and healthy ecosystems underpin community wellbeing, resilience, productivity and economic prosperity. Many described this as one of the strongest components of the strategy.
- **Need stronger recognition of productive landscapes and food production:** Several respondents wanted greater acknowledgement of the role that farming, food production and productive landscapes play alongside biodiversity outcomes.
- **Funding and investment need to match ambition:** Numerous responses questioned how biodiversity can be treated as "essential infrastructure" without a dedicated funding approach comparable to other forms of infrastructure.
- **Need for measurable success indicators:** Reponses noted the need for clearer indicators, targets and reporting mechanisms to demonstrate whether biodiversity, resilience and prosperity are improving over time.
- **Broader view of ecosystem health:** Many respondents argued that roadsides, waterways, small habitat fragments, soil health and ecological processes should be recognised alongside larger and more visible ecosystems when defining prosperity and resilience.

5 What we heard for Questions 16 to 27 - Pou

The next 12 questions in the survey asked respondents about each of the strategy's four pou and associated strategic focus areas:

- Whether the pou and associated strategic focus areas should be included in the strategy - and if not, why not;
- Suggestions on how the pou and its strategic focus areas should be rewritten.

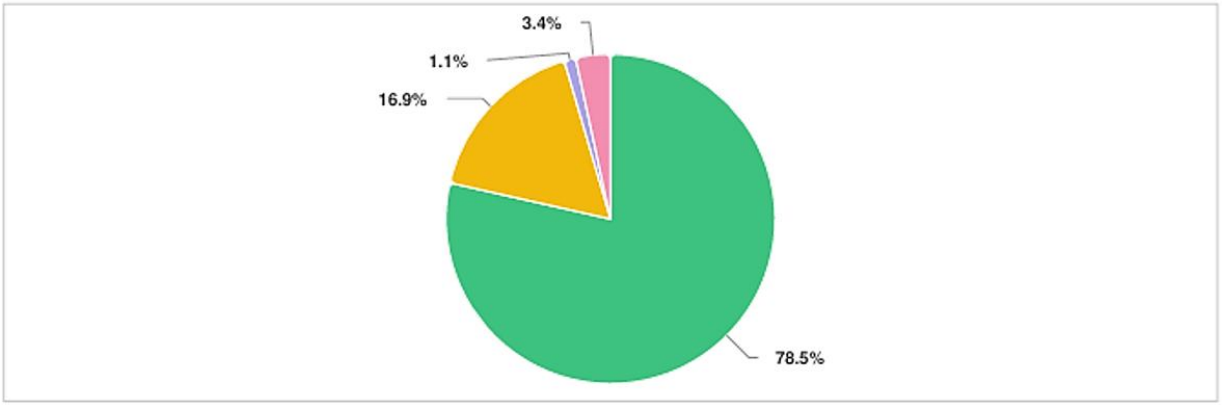
The feedback can be distilled into the following substantive themes under each pou.

Pou #1: Protecting and restoring what matters

Protecting and restoring native species, habitats and the ecological functioning of ecosystems by addressing climate, biosecurity and other threats while preserving the values that connect people to the environment.

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Prioritise restoration of the region's most threatened, rare and vulnerable ecosystems**
- **Reconnect ecosystems through ecological corridors and buffers – ki uta ki tai (mountains to sea)**
- **Protect and restore wetlands, peatlands, floodplains, riparian margins and coastal systems as frontline nature-based solutions for climate and ecosystem resilience**
- **Scale up coordinated landscape-scale pest control operations including marine pests with specific targets**



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	139	78.5
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	30	16.9
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	2	1.1
Prefer not to answer	6	3.4

Optional question · 177 responses · 3 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Priority ecosystems versus broader biodiversity protection:** While there was strong support for prioritising rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystems, many respondents were concerned that healthy, declining and more common ecosystems could be overlooked. Feedback consistently called for greater recognition of

maintaining existing biodiversity values, protecting small habitat remnants, roadside vegetation and preventing ecosystems from becoming threatened in the first place.

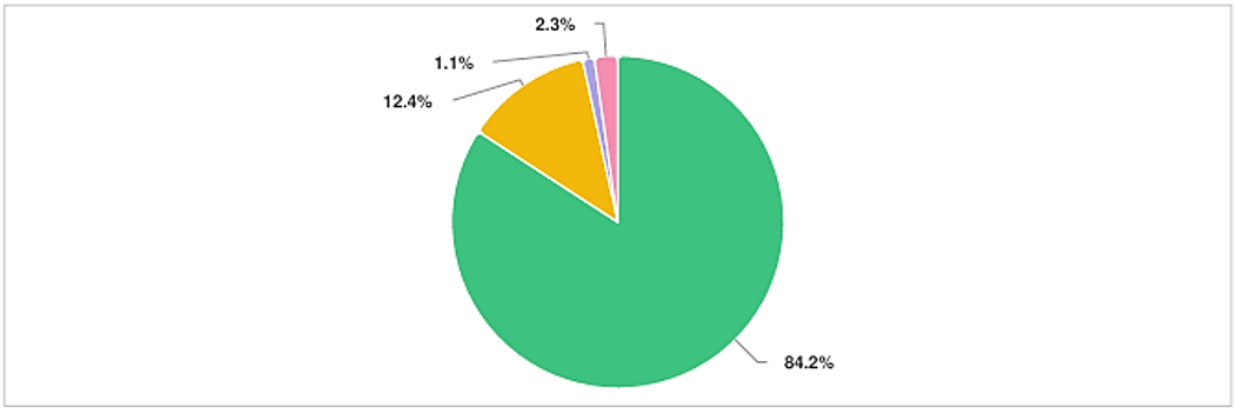
- **Maintenance before expansion:** A recurring theme was that ecosystem maintenance and protection should receive at least equal emphasis to restoration and expansion, with concerns that gains in one area should not come at the expense of existing high-value ecosystems elsewhere.
- **Species recovery needs greater prominence:** Many respondents felt Pou 1 focused too heavily on ecosystems while under-emphasising threatened species recovery. Suggestions included dedicated threatened species recovery programmes, threat status improvement targets, commitments to avoid further extinctions, and stronger recognition that ecosystem restoration alone may not recover all species.
- **Stronger pest and weed management:** Pest plants and pest animals were consistently identified as one of the most significant biodiversity threats. Respondents wanted greater emphasis on environmental weeds (particularly woolly nightshade and privet), predator control, pathway management, feral cats, and stronger alignment with Predator Free 2050, the Regional Pest Management Plan and Waikato Biosecurity Strategy.
- **Landscape-scale ecological connectivity:** Respondents strongly supported ecological corridors and landscape-scale restoration but wanted greater emphasis on reconnecting fragmented habitats, linking mountains to sea, supporting species movement, and improving connectivity across public and private land.
- **Urban, marine and roadside biodiversity:** Many respondents felt Pou 1 focuses too strongly on terrestrial and freshwater environments and should better recognise urban biodiversity, marine ecosystems, roadside ecology, streams and small habitat fragments that contribute to regional ecological networks.
- **Protecting genetic diversity:** Respondents sought stronger recognition of genetic diversity, including the role of isolated populations, small remnants and less common habitat patches in maintaining regional resilience and species recovery.
- **Clearer targets and urgency:** Respondents repeatedly sought measurable biodiversity gains, earlier implementation of key actions, stronger restoration targets and more urgency in protecting vulnerable ecosystems and species.

Pou #2: Empowering landowners and communities

Empowering landowners and local communities through advocacy, education and practical support while building community capacity and capability to actively participate in biodiversity efforts.

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Maintain a network of regional biodiversity support hubs for community groups, landowners and local iwi/hapū**
- **Facilitate long-term, coordinated and accessible funding to enable secure long investment in biodiversity restoration**
- **Grow public awareness, participation and storytelling about biodiversity across the region**
- **Build capacity and capability for locally led action**



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	149	84.2
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	22	12.4
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	2	1.1
Prefer not to answer	4	2.3

Optional question · 177 responses · 3 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

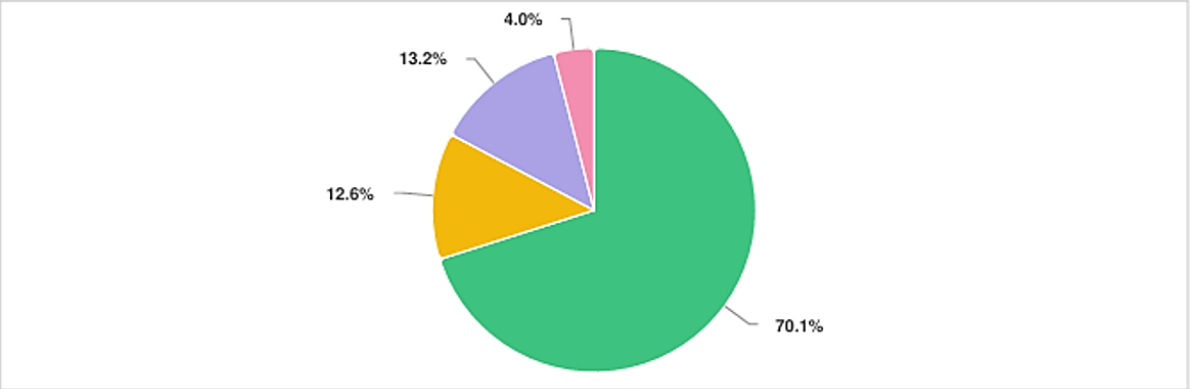
- **Practical support over awareness alone:** Responses raised various concerns that advocacy, education and awareness by themselves will not deliver biodiversity outcomes. Respondents wanted practical support including technical advice, biodiversity planning, training, equipment, volunteer coordination and hands-on assistance.
- **More funding and incentives:** Respondents consistently argued that communities and landowners are being asked to deliver outcomes without sufficient support. Suggestions included grants, fencing and planting subsidies, rates relief, biodiversity incentives, catchment funding and more accessible long-term support.
- **Support existing groups and networks:** Many respondents emphasised that established community groups, predator-free programmes, catchment groups and biodiversity hubs are already delivering results and should receive ongoing funding and support rather than being replaced by new structures.
- **Community hubs and coordination are important:** Respondents strongly supported biodiversity support hubs, improved collaboration between groups, regional coordination and practical support systems that connect communities with expertise, funding and resources.
- **Need for outcome-focused indicators:** Several submissions argued that indicators such as awareness and participation only measure activity and do not show whether biodiversity is improving. Many wanted monitoring linked directly to biodiversity outcomes.
- **Private landowners need recognition:** There was repeated feedback that private landowners, particularly farmers, are already investing significant effort and resources in biodiversity and should be recognised, supported and rewarded rather than simply relied upon.
- **Balance support and regulation:** Some respondents felt voluntary participation alone would be insufficient and suggested a stronger balance between incentives, support mechanisms and regulatory approaches where necessary.

Pou #3: Partnering with tangata whenua

Working alongside iwi and hapū to embed mātauranga Māori and guide engagement, leadership and delivery in biodiversity management, while upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Embed iwi aspirations, te ao Māori values, and mātauranga Māori into all biodiversity planning and delivery**
- **Establish long-term, equitable funding pathways to support iwi, hapū and whānau-led biodiversity action**
- **Co-design and implement Māori-led monitoring and kaitiaki development programmes**
- **Create co-designed partnership models for ecosystem restoration on shared Māori land**
- **Restore culturally significant biodiversity sites and revitalise customary practices.**



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	122	70.1
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	22	12.6
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	23	13.2
Prefer not to answer	7	4.0

Optional question · 174 responses · 6 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Differing views on Māori leadership:** Many respondents preferred biodiversity restoration to be framed as a shared community responsibility and questioned the prominence given to Māori leadership, while others supported Treaty partnerships, rangatiratanga, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga.
- **Recognition of Māori landowners and Māori interests:** Several respondents wanted clearer recognition of Māori private landowners, Māori-owned land, Māori organisations and place-based Māori leadership in biodiversity restoration.
- **Science and mātauranga Māori together:** A significant theme was support for integrating mātauranga Māori alongside ecological science, monitoring, research and local knowledge, rather than treating these as competing approaches.
- **Clarification of customary practices:** Many respondents wanted clearer explanations of customary practices and assurance that revitalisation of these practices would support, rather than undermine, biodiversity outcomes.

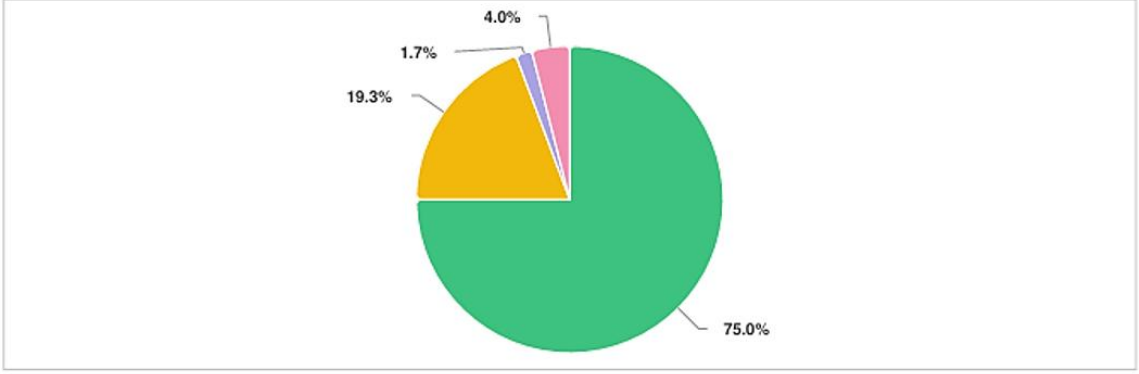
- **Need for clearer language:** Respondents often sought clearer explanations of concepts such as kaitiakitanga, Māori-led monitoring, shared Māori land and the role of mātauranga Māori in biodiversity management.
- **Partnership rather than exclusive leadership:** Even among respondents supportive of Māori involvement, there was a recurring desire to emphasise partnership and collaboration across iwi, communities, scientists, landowners and agencies.
- **Protecting culturally significant places and species:** Feedback supported protecting wāhi tapu, culturally significant sites, customary practices and taonga species as important biodiversity and cultural outcomes.

Pou #4: Strengthening data, policy and investment

Building the quality data, policy and funding settings needed to prioritise the right places for biodiversity restoration, measure impact and guide action across the Waikato region.

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Strengthen policy consistency and alignment across councils and central government**
- **Develop a clear biodiversity spatial framework for the region**
- **Set and implement regional environmental limits for biodiversity**
- **Deliver "no net loss of indigenous biodiversity" through clear policy and strong rules**
- **Develop and implement targeted incentives to reverse ongoing ecosystem degradation and drive biodiversity gains beyond "no net loss"**
- **Build shared understanding and better knowledge through targeted research, consistent biodiversity monitoring and clear, accessible information**



Question options	responses	%
Yes - I agree that this outcome should be included as it is currently written.	132	75.0
Conditionally - I agree with parts of this outcome but believe other parts should be rewritten.	34	19.3
No - No version of this outcome should be included.	3	1.7
Prefer not to answer	7	4.0

Optional question · 176 responses · 4 skipped
Question type : Radio Button Question

Feedback

- **Measurable targets, baselines and accountability:** This was one of the most commented areas overall. Respondents wanted clear baselines, quantified targets, measurable indicators, transparent reporting and interim milestones to demonstrate whether biodiversity is actually improving.

- **Move beyond 'no net loss':** Many respondents considered no net loss too weak for a strategy extending to 2050. There were repeated calls for explicit biodiversity gains, ecosystem recovery, improving species status and stronger restoration outcomes.
- **Earlier action and stronger incentives:** Respondents argued that restoration incentives, funding mechanisms and policy alignment are scheduled too late in the implementation pathway and should be prioritised earlier.
- **More investment and economic support:** The responses included significant support for biodiversity funds, rates remission, biodiversity credits, transferable development rights, subsidies and long-term funding arrangements to support restoration and stewardship on private land.
- **Policy certainty and legislative reform:** Respondents highlighted concerns about local government reform, resource management reform, environmental limits and future national policy changes, seeking greater clarity, flexibility and alignment.
- **Better biodiversity data and monitoring:** Many submissions sought stronger monitoring frameworks, regional threat status assessments, improved biodiversity mapping, clearer ecological indicators and greater scientific rigour in measuring outcomes.
- **Data sovereignty and trust:** Some respondents emphasised the need for Māori data sovereignty, protection of mātauranga Māori, and clear rules governing the collection, use and ownership of biodiversity information.
- **Recognising private land stewardship:** A significant theme from farming and rural stakeholders was that biodiversity data, policy and investment frameworks should recognise existing stewardship, avoid creating disincentives for conservation, and build trust with landowners.
- **Broader indicators of success:** Several responses suggested monitoring should include social, cultural and community measures alongside ecological indicators, recognising the importance of capability, partnerships, participation and long-term stewardship.

6 What we heard for Question 28 – General comments

Respondents were asked an open-ended question at the end of the survey to provide additional feedback on the strategy.

The general comments reveal a number of highly consistent themes that cut across individual topics and stakeholder groups.

Stronger Pest Plant and Pest Animal Management

This was one of the most consistent themes throughout the additional comments.

- Respondents repeatedly identified **woolly nightshade, privet, climbing asparagus, giant privet and other invasive weeds** as major threats that are not receiving enough attention.
- There were calls for a stronger focus on **weed control**, better alignment with the Regional Pest Management Plan, more support for community weed control groups, and greater emphasis on **prevention and enforcement**.
- Many respondents also highlighted the need for stronger management of **feral and domestic cats**, predator control and landscape-scale pest management.
- Several respondents argued that biodiversity goals would not be achieved if "the elephants in the room" such as privet and woolly nightshade continue to spread unchecked.

Illustrative comments:

"Weed control is the first and most important step in reducing biodiversity decline."

"You cannot achieve your goals of landscape scale restoration if you ignore the elephants in the room - the Privet, Woolly Nightshade, Climbing Asparagus and so on."

More Funding, Incentives and Practical Support

A very strong theme was concern that the strategy's aspirations may not be achievable without significant investment.

- Respondents sought **funding certainty**, rates relief, grants, biodiversity investment funds, fencing support, riparian planting assistance and practical incentives.
- Many landowners and community groups felt they are already carrying much of the burden of biodiversity restoration without adequate support.
- There were repeated calls for funded biodiversity coordinators, technical advisors, support hubs and long-term funding arrangements rather than short-term project grants.

Illustrative comments:

"The community is being asked to do more without the Council committing the resources or incentives needed to facilitate that action."

"I am concerned with what the flow-on effect of reprioritisation or reallocation of existing funds would have on current recipients of funding support."

Supporting Existing Community Groups and Volunteers

Many submissions recognised the important role of volunteers and existing community groups.

- Feedback consistently argued that existing predator-free groups, catchment groups, biodiversity trusts and restoration groups should be supported rather than creating new programmes.
- Respondents wanted support for coordination, volunteer recruitment, training, equipment, monitoring and administration.
- Several respondents described community groups as being "at the coal face" of biodiversity restoration and requiring greater support.

Illustrative comments:

"Help us to help you."

"Community engagement needs to be treated as core infrastructure, not an optional extra."

Implementation, Accountability and Delivery

A recurring concern was that the strategy is ambitious but lacks sufficient detail about how it will be delivered.

- Respondents frequently sought a funded implementation plan, clear responsibilities, accountability mechanisms and practical delivery pathways.
- Many responses questioned whether the strategy relies too heavily on goodwill and aspiration.
- Several respondents wanted measurable outcomes, timeframes, monitoring frameworks and clearer reporting.

Illustrative comments:

"I sincerely hope this strategy is backed by a robust, fully funded implementation plan. I look forward to seeing the details of that plan and the timeline for its rollout."

"The test will be in the implementation plan and how this is approached."

Balancing Priority Ecosystems with Broader Biodiversity Protection

A number of submissions were concerned about focusing too heavily on priority ecosystems.

- Respondents generally supported prioritisation but warned against only funding the "most threatened" areas.
- There was strong support for maintaining healthy ecosystems, protecting smaller fragments, roadsides and waterways, and taking opportunities where willing landowners are ready to act.
- Several respondents described a "squeaky wheel" approach that only responds to crisis situations.

Illustrative comments:

"Cannot rely on a glass case collection of all the best prettiest bits."

"The roadside ecology and small patches of nature are often the vital links that can join mountains to sea."

Recognition of Māori and Treaty Partnerships

Additional feedback reinforced themes seen elsewhere in the survey.

- Some respondents strongly supported kaitiakitanga, Te Tiriti and Māori-led restoration approaches.
- Others felt the strategy gave too much prominence to Māori-specific leadership and wanted biodiversity framed as a shared responsibility across all communities.
- Several submissions sought a greater emphasis on partnership rather than leadership.

Illustrative comments:

"Work with iwi as part of going forward. But only as one of a number of stakeholders."

"I really like the focus on kaitiakitanga and Māori-led solutions."

Policy, Legislative Reform and Future Governance

Many respondents expressed concern about policy uncertainty.

- Respondents frequently referenced local government reform, RMA reform, Conservation Amendment proposals and changes to government priorities.
- There was concern about maintaining momentum if institutional arrangements change.
- Several respondents sought a strategy that is flexible enough to remain relevant despite future legislative reform.

Illustrative comments:

"There is a lot of uncertainty at the moment with regional council restructuring."

"Who will have the responsibility of following and owning the strategy document, and developing the implementation plan once a local government amalgamation proposal for the Waikato region has been confirmed?"

Better Monitoring, Data and Measurable Outcomes

Many respondents wanted better biodiversity information and measurement.

- Calls were made for baseline assessments, regional threat status assessments, biodiversity mapping and project-level reporting.
- Several respondents wanted community and landowner actions to be recorded and recognised in monitoring systems.
- There were requests for improved data tools, reporting platforms and spatial prioritisation.

Illustrative comments:

"How is biodiversity being measured and recorded?"

"Many landowners are already trapping, baiting, planting or restoring habitat, but their efforts are often invisible in regional reporting."

Urban Biodiversity, Waterways and Local Nature

A number of comments focused on enabling biodiversity maintenance and restoration closer to where people live.

- Respondents wanted more emphasis on stream restoration, urban habitats, roadside biodiversity, street trees and restoration within towns.
- There was strong support for improving ecological connectivity within urban environments and restoring riparian margins.

Illustrative comments:

"There is plenty of opportunities to improve habitat within town."

"Opportunities to connect with nature close to everyday environments are vital."

Broad Support for the Overall Strategy

Despite numerous suggestions for improvement, many respondents expressed strong support for the strategy overall.

- Many described it as comprehensive, ambitious, well-structured and an important step forward.
- Several organisations explicitly endorsed the overall direction and biodiversity vision.
- Common praise included recognition of ecological connectivity, landscape-scale restoration, community involvement and biodiversity as essential infrastructure.

Illustrative comments:

"This strategy provides a strong foundation for biodiversity restoration across the Waikato region."

"We strongly support the Waikato Regional Biodiversity Strategy."

"Well done. I certainly approve of this strategy."

7 Key feedback themes and implications for strategy amendments

The themes outlined below represent the most common and recurring matters raised through the engagement process. While individual submissions often focused on specific outcomes, pou or strategic focus areas, these themes emerged consistently across the feedback and provide insight into the areas where respondents would like to see the strategy strengthened, clarified or prioritised.

The themes are intended to help identify the key messages arising from the engagement and provide a high-level summary of the matters most frequently raised by respondents, rather than reflect the views of any single submitter or organisation.

Waikato Regional Council (WRC) responses, alongside the recommended changes to the strategy resulting from the responses received are set out below each theme.

Theme 1: Measurable Targets, Monitoring and Accountability

This was one of the most prominent themes across the engagement.

While respondents generally supported the vision and direction of the strategy, many felt **Outcomes 1, 2 and 5**, as well as elements of **Pou 4**, lacked sufficient specificity around what success would actually look like, how progress would be measured, and who would be accountable for delivery.

Respondents repeatedly called for quantified targets, baseline assessments, interim milestones, clear indicators and regular public reporting. Broad statements such as *"ecosystems flourish and expand"*, *"species are recovering"* and *"people and nature prosper together"* were seen as difficult to assess without measurable outcomes and timelines. Feedback was **particularly** strong in relation to **Outcome 1**, **Outcome 2** and **Strategic Focus Area 19**.

A second recurring concern was that monitoring should demonstrate real biodiversity outcomes rather than activities or participation.

Respondents questioned whether measures within this theme would actually demonstrate biodiversity improvement (i.e. numbers of biodiversity hubs, awareness campaigns, volunteer groups or participation rates). There were repeated calls for monitoring ecosystem condition, species abundance, habitat extent, connectivity, fish passage, threat status and biodiversity gains.

Several respondents also supported regional biodiversity baselines, regional threat status assessments and improved biodiversity mapping and reporting.

WRC response

Agree in principle. Clearer measures of success will strengthen the Strategy and provide greater transparency and accountability for progress towards the outcomes. However, the Strategy is intended to provide long-term regional direction and should remain high level.

Detailed targets, measures, milestones and reporting arrangements will be developed through implementation planning, informed by available baseline information and existing monitoring programmes. Development of regional measures should also involve Waikato Biodiversity Accord partners and other relevant partners, recognising that delivery of the Strategy is a shared regional responsibility.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Include linkages within the strategy to existing monitoring and reporting programmes including State of the Environment reporting and other relevant regional monitoring. Acknowledge the need to develop measures of success against the Strategy.

- Clarify the relationship between the Strategy and implementation plan to include further detail on that targets, interim milestones, monitoring methods and reporting arrangements will be considered and developed through implementation planning in partnership with Accord partners and other relevant organisations.
- Include an infographic or other supporting graphic showing existing regional biodiversity monitoring and initiatives and how the strategy fits wider biodiversity monitoring framework.

Theme 2: Acting Sooner and Increasing Urgency

Many respondents supported the **2050 vision** but were concerned that biodiversity decline is occurring now and cannot wait until mid-century.

Across **Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 5**, respondents repeatedly described 2050 as too distant and argued that threatened species and ecosystems may be lost before that timeframe is reached. Several respondents suggested milestone years such as 2030 or 2040, while others advocated for formal 5-year and 10-year checkpoints.

This concern extended into implementation sequencing. Numerous respondents questioned why biodiversity restoration, pest control, policy alignment and incentive programmes appeared as medium- or long-term priorities in **Table 2**. Many specifically argued that restoration of threatened ecosystems **(SFA1)**, pest management **(SFA4)** and restoration incentives **(SFA18)** should be brought forward into short-term implementation.

WRC response

Agree in principle. The 2050 timeframe provides an appropriate long-term horizon for the strategy; it was not intended to imply that action is deferred until 2050. Biodiversity decline and pressures on threatened ecosystems and species require ongoing and, in some areas, immediate action.

The strategy should therefore provide clearer signals about near- and medium-term progress while retaining 2050 as the long-term vision. Detailed sequencing and delivery timeframes should be established through implementation planning also recognising existing programmes and activities already underway.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Retain 2050 as the long-term strategic horizon but make the need for earlier action more explicit in the introductory and implementation sections.
- Revisit the review cycle in the strategy (section 3.3) and ensure that this is aligned with other relevant strategy and funding cycles, for example the Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and Long-Term Plan.
- Review the implementation sequencing of priority actions, particularly restoration of threatened ecosystems, landscape-scale pest management and incentives, to determine whether these should be signalled as short-term priorities.
- Clarify that implementation begins from adoption of the strategy, rather than suggesting that substantive biodiversity action will occur only in later phases (for instance, consider changing the categories to identify the expected emphasis for delivery and investment over time, rather than when work will commence).
- Where detailed timing depends on funding, partnerships or further work, identify this through the implementation plan rather than creating unfunded commitments within the strategy itself.

Theme 3: Balancing Restoration, Maintenance and Prioritisation

There was broad support for prioritising rare, threatened and highly depleted ecosystems and species; however, many respondents were concerned that the strategy could become overly focused on biodiversity already in crisis.

A recurring concern was that healthy ecosystems, roadside remnants, small habitat fragments and ecosystems that are currently stable may be overlooked until they become threatened. Several respondents described this as a "squeaky wheel" approach. This theme appeared frequently in feedback on **Outcome 1 and Pou 1**, particularly in relation to **SFA1**.

A strong message emerging from the feedback was that biodiversity maintenance should sit alongside restoration. Respondents argued that protecting existing wetlands, forests, ecological corridors and remnant habitats may deliver more durable outcomes than allowing sites to decline and then restoring them later.

There were also repeated calls to recognise and support existing biodiversity stewardship occurring on private land and through community-led restoration projects.

WRC response

Agree. Prioritisation is necessary to focus resources where needs and potential benefits are greatest. However, this should not be interpreted as limiting biodiversity action to ecosystems already in serious decline. Preventing further degradation and maintaining existing biodiversity values can be more effective and cost-efficient than restoring them after they have been lost or degraded. The strategy needs to provide for a balanced approach encompassing protection, maintenance, restoration and expansion.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen Outcome 1 and Pou 1 wording so that maintaining and protecting existing biodiversity values is clearly expressed alongside restoration and expansion.
- Clarify the purpose of prioritisation is to optimise resource use. Priority ecosystems and species receive particular focus, noting that this does not exclude action in healthy ecosystems, smaller remnants or other areas with important biodiversity values.
- Recognise prevention of biodiversity decline as an explicit component of the strategy, alongside restoration of already degraded systems.
- Recognise existing stewardship on private land and community-led restoration, including the value of maintaining biodiversity gains already achieved.
- Recognise the role of smaller habitat fragments, roadside vegetation, waterways and ecological stepping stones where these contribute to wider ecosystem function and connectivity.

Theme 4: Moving Beyond "No Net Loss"

One of the clearest strategic themes concerned dissatisfaction with the concept of "no net loss", particularly within **Outcome 1 and Pou** 4.

Many respondents argued that no net loss is insufficient in a region where significant biodiversity decline has already occurred and does not represent an ambitious enough goal for a 25-year strategy. Several respondents explicitly called for the strategy to pursue biodiversity gain rather than simply maintaining a depleted baseline.

Many respondents advocated explicitly for biodiversity gain, ecological recovery and positive improvement in species and ecosystem condition. Suggestions included commitments to no further species extinctions, delivering measurable biodiversity gains, improved threat status for all Threatened and At-Risk species, strengthening restoration incentives to achieve outcomes beyond no net loss and increasing ecosystem extent and connectivity. Feedback on **SFA17** and **SFA18** was particularly strong in this area.

Several respondents also questioned whether no-net-loss approaches elsewhere have been successful and argued that biodiversity offsetting should not become a substitute for protection and restoration.

WRC response

Agree in principle. The Strategy should clearly aspire to biodiversity recovery and gain. It is acknowledged that “no net loss” has a role as a policy concept for avoiding further biodiversity loss, but on its own it does not

adequately describe the long-term ambition of a regional biodiversity strategy to 2050. The Strategy should distinguish between preventing further loss and achieving positive biodiversity outcomes. References in the strategy should not predetermine the outcome of statutory policy or regulatory approaches under the Resource Management Act reform and other planning processes.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Review references to "no net loss", particularly within Pou 4, so that it is not presented as the ultimate biodiversity outcome of the Strategy.
- Strengthen the strategic direction toward biodiversity gain, recovery and improvement in ecosystem extent, condition, connectivity and species status.
- Clarify that avoiding further loss is a minimum foundation, while the Strategy seeks longer-term restoration and biodiversity gains.
- Avoid wording that could imply biodiversity offsetting is a substitute for avoiding, protecting or restoring biodiversity, noting that detailed regulatory provisions sit outside the Strategy.
- Consider whether SFA17 and SFA18 should be reframed to clearly differentiate loss-prevention mechanisms from initiatives designed to generate positive biodiversity gains.

Theme 5: Funding, Incentives and Long-Term Investment

Funding emerged as one of the most frequently discussed issues throughout the engagement process.

Respondents repeatedly questioned how the strategy's ambitions could be achieved without clearer funding commitments, particularly given the statement in **Section 3.1** that no new funding is assumed. Several respondents also questioned how biodiversity outcomes would be achieved using existing funding alone, particularly where delivery relies on iwi, hapū, whānau, volunteers and community groups already experiencing capacity and resourcing constraints.

Respondents frequently noted the tension between positioning biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure while not identifying comparable long-term funding arrangements. This theme featured strongly in **Outcome 3, Outcome 5, Pou 2, Pou 4 and general comments**.

There was strong support for practical funding mechanisms and incentives. Suggestions included grants, rates relief, fencing subsidies, riparian planting support, biodiversity funds, biodiversity credits, transferable development rights, restoration incentives and long-term maintenance funding.

Many respondents stressed that biodiversity outcomes provide public benefits and therefore landowners, volunteers and community groups should not be expected to bear a disproportionate share of the costs associated with biodiversity protection and restoration.

WRC response

Agree. Sustainable investment is fundamental to implementation. The strategy cannot itself commit WRC, Biodiversity Accord partners or future organisations to expenditure that has not been approved through their respective funding processes. However, it can provide a stronger strategic commitment to identifying, coordinating and enabling long-term investment and incentives.

Funding should be viewed as a shared regional challenge involving central and local government, iwi, philanthropic organisations, landowners, business and communities rather than as a WRC responsibility alone.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen references to long-term investment and funding pathways, while making clear that specific funding decisions remain subject to Long Term Plans, Annual Plans and the decision-making processes of partner organisations.
- Retain and strengthen the focus on coordinated and accessible funding mechanisms for biodiversity action.

- Identify investigation of incentives as an implementation priority, potentially including grants, rates mechanisms and other approaches raised through engagement, without committing the strategy to specific mechanisms before they have been assessed.
- Recognise the contribution already made by landowners, volunteers, iwi/hapū and community organisations, and the public benefits arising from their biodiversity stewardship.
- Review wording suggesting that "no new funding is assumed" so it does not unintentionally imply that the Strategy can be implemented without additional or reprioritised investment.

Theme 6: Supporting Existing Community Groups, Volunteers and Landowners

Respondents consistently recognised that biodiversity outcomes will depend heavily on community groups, volunteers, catchment groups, iwi organisations, predator-free initiatives and private landowners.

There was strong appreciation for the work already being undertaken across the region and repeated calls for the strategy to recognise and strengthen those efforts. This theme was most evident in feedback on **Outcome 3, Pou 2 and Question 28**.

A common concern was that many existing groups are already stretched and require support and practical assistance rather than additional obligations.

Suggestions included biodiversity advisory services, volunteer coordinators, support hubs, grant-writing assistance, technical expertise, training, equipment, long-term administration funding and practical support for biodiversity work on private land. A common message was that implementation should build on existing capability rather than create new layers of bureaucracy.

WRC response

Agree. Existing community groups, landowners, iwi/hapū organisations, catchment groups and other local initiatives provide significant capability/experience and should form an important foundation for implementation. The strategy needs to support, connect and strengthen existing networks rather than assume that new organisational structures are always required. Support needs will vary across the region and may include advice, coordination, capability development, access to funding, equipment and technical expertise.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Review references to establishing biodiversity support hubs so that these could involve strengthening or connecting existing networks and services, rather than necessarily creating new entities.
- Strengthen the emphasis on practical support, including technical advice, capability building, coordination and assistance to access funding.
- Recognise private landowners and community organisations as existing biodiversity stewards and delivery partners, rather than describing them primarily as audiences to be encouraged to participate.

Theme 7: Pest Plants, Pest Animals and Biosecurity

Pest management was one of the most strongly supported areas for action throughout the consultation.

Across **outcomes, pou and general comments**, respondents repeatedly identified invasive weeds and pest animals as major barriers to biodiversity recovery. Particular concern was expressed about woolly nightshade, privet, climbing asparagus, giant privet, possums, stoats, rats and feral cats. Feedback on **Pou 1 - SFA4 and many of the general comments** reinforced this theme.

Many respondents argued that weed control and predator control should be treated as core biodiversity activities rather than secondary actions.

There were repeated calls for stronger pathway management to prevent new incursions, earlier pest-control implementation, landscape-scale pest programmes, greater emphasis on environmental weeds and improved alignment with the Regional Pest Management Plan and Predator Free 2050.

Several respondents argued that restoration efforts will continue to struggle unless pest pressures are addressed more comprehensively and urgently.

WRC response

Agree. Effective management of pest plants, pest animals and emerging biosecurity threats is fundamental to maintaining and restoring biodiversity. The Strategy should provide clearer recognition of this relationship while avoiding duplication of the statutory and operational functions of the Regional Pest Management Plan and other biosecurity programmes. Biodiversity and biosecurity implementation should be mutually reinforcing and coordinated at appropriate landscape scales.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen Pou 1 and associated strategic focus areas to explicitly recognise both pest plants and pest animals as pressures on indigenous biodiversity.
- Strengthen alignment with the Regional Pest Management Plan, Waikato Biosecurity Strategy and relevant national initiatives, while retaining the distinct role of the biodiversity strategy.
- Review implementation sequencing so that priority landscape-scale pest management is clearly treated as an early and ongoing component of biodiversity recovery, where appropriate.

Theme 8: Landscape-Scale Restoration, Connectivity and Spatial Planning

Many respondents strongly supported the *ki uta ki tai* concept and viewed ecological connectivity as a core component of biodiversity recovery.

Feedback consistently emphasised the importance of terrestrial and freshwater corridors, stepping stones, fish passage, riparian restoration, urban habitat linkages and connectivity between fragmented ecosystems. This theme appeared strongly in **Outcome 1, Outcome 2 and Pou 1**.

There was also strong support for broadening the strategy's spatial focus.

Respondents wanted greater recognition of urban biodiversity, marine ecosystems, roadsides, streams, wetlands, floodplains and ecological connections across public and private land i.e. beyond priority sites.

Several respondents also called for biodiversity priorities to be integrated into regional spatial planning processes and corridor mapping exercises.

WRC response

Agree. Ecological connectivity is fundamental to resilient ecosystems and species recovery, particularly in a highly fragmented landscape and in a changing climate. The strategy should continue to support a *ki uta ki tai* and landscape-scale approach while making clearer that connectivity can be provided through a range of ecosystem types, corridors, stepping stones and smaller habitat areas across public and private land. Regional spatial information can help guide coordinated investment and restoration, although site-specific regulatory decisions remain within statutory planning processes.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Strengthen references to ecological connectivity throughout Outcomes 1 and 2 and Pou 1, including corridors, stepping stones and linkages between fragmented habitats.
- Broaden examples of biodiversity environments to where appropriate recognise urban biodiversity, streams, roadsides, marine and coastal environments, wetlands, riparian margins and smaller habitat remnants.

- Retain and strengthen the proposed regional biodiversity spatial framework, with its purpose clearly described as supporting prioritisation, coordination, connectivity and investment.
- Recognise that connectivity occurs across multiple land tenures and ownership arrangements, requiring voluntary collaboration and partnership with landowners, councils, iwi/hapū and other organisations.

Theme 9: Recognition of Māori, Treaty Partnerships and Mātauranga Māori

Feedback revealed differing views about the prominence given to Māori leadership, Treaty partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga.

Many respondents were of the view that biodiversity restoration should be framed primarily as a shared community responsibility rather than a Māori-led activity. Some viewed **Outcome 4 and Pou 3** as placing too much emphasis on ethnicity and leadership roles.

However, there was also strong support from other respondents for maintaining or strengthening the Māori partnership focus.

Supportive submissions highlighted the importance of Treaty partnerships, Māori landowners, cultural values, taonga species, customary practices and mātauranga Māori.

Across both supportive and critical comments, a common theme emerged that biodiversity outcomes will be strongest when mātauranga Māori, ecological science, local knowledge and practical experience are brought together through genuine partnership approaches. Some respondents also highlighted the need to recognise the diversity of iwi perspectives across the region, including differences in cultural indicators, aspirations and participation in implementation.

WRC response

Acknowledge the range of views received. The Strategy should continue to recognise the distinct roles, relationships and interests of iwi and hapū, including mātauranga Māori, kaitiakitanga, Māori land and taonga species, while also making clear that biodiversity restoration is a shared regional endeavour involving many communities, landowners, agencies and knowledge systems. Greater clarity of terminology and intended roles may address some of the concerns expressed without removing the partnership foundations of the Strategy.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Retain Outcome 4 and Pou 3, while refining the wording to clarify that biodiversity restoration relies on broad community participation and, where appropriate, place-based Māori leadership through Te Tiriti-based partnerships.
- Retain the recognition of iwi/hapū partnerships, mātauranga Māori and kaitiakitanga, while reviewing language to make the respective roles of tangata whenua, Accord partners, landowners, communities and agencies clearer.
- Clarify that regional biodiversity restoration is a shared responsibility, alongside recognition of the relationships, responsibilities and interests of tangata whenua.
- Strengthen wording recognising the complementary use of mātauranga Māori, ecological science, local knowledge and practical experience in decision-making and monitoring.
- Recognise Māori landowners and Māori organisations more explicitly where landowner or community stewardship is discussed.
- Where customary practices are referenced, clarify that their treatment within the strategy is in the context of achieving biodiversity and cultural outcomes.

Theme 10: Legislative Reform, Governance and Future Policy Direction

Many respondents raised concerns about uncertainty created by ongoing local government reform, resource management reform and changing environmental policy settings.

People questioned how the strategy would remain relevant if regional governance structures change or national biodiversity policy evolves. Respondents frequently sought confidence that biodiversity outcomes would continue to be prioritised regardless of future institutional arrangements. Greater clarity was also sought about long-term ownership of the strategy and responsibility for implementation if future local government structures change.

A second strand of this feedback related to the role of the strategy itself.

Some respondents argued that the strategy should remain a high-level document focused on vision, outcomes and broad direction, with detailed policy settings, limits and regulatory mechanisms considered through future statutory planning processes.

Others argued that stronger policy direction, environmental bottom lines and regulatory tools are required if biodiversity outcomes are to be achieved.

This tension was particularly evident in feedback on **Pou 4**, with the environmental limits and no-net-loss provisions.

WRC response

Agree. The Strategy should be sufficiently durable and adaptable to remain useful through future legislative and institutional change. Its primary role should be to establish a long-term regional biodiversity vision, outcomes and strategic direction rather than predetermine detailed statutory provisions. Where regulatory tools or environmental limits may contribute to achieving biodiversity outcomes, these should be considered through the appropriate statutory processes.

Recommended changes to strategy

- Review wording that could be interpreted as predetermining future statutory policy, particularly references to environmental limits, rules or specific regulatory approaches.
- Retain clear strategic direction on the outcomes sought while stating that specific regulatory mechanisms will be determined through relevant statutory planning and decision-making processes.
- Frame delivery as a regional and partnership-based endeavour so that the Strategy's long-term direction is not unnecessarily dependent on the continuation of any single institutional structure.

8 Conclusion

The 187 responses received through Phase 2 show broad support for the draft Regional Biodiversity Strategy, but also a clear expectation that it be strengthened before it is finalised. Respondents supported the 2050 vision, *ki uta ki tai* approach, ecological connectivity, community involvement and the recognition of biodiversity as essential natural infrastructure. At the same time, they asked for a stronger bridge between that long-term direction and what needs to happen in practice: clearer measures of success, earlier action, better pest plant and pest animal management, stronger protection and maintenance of existing biodiversity, improved funding and incentives, and practical support for the landowners, iwi/hapū, community groups and volunteers already doing biodiversity work across the region.

The recommended amendments respond to the main points raised in the feedback while keeping the strategy as a long-term regional framework. They include clearer links to monitoring and reporting, a stronger signal that implementation starts from adoption, review points aligned with future planning and funding cycles, earlier consideration of restoration, pest management and incentives, and wording that treats “no net loss” as a minimum rather than the overall ambition. The feedback also shows where the final strategy needs to carefully reflect different perspectives, including the balance between voluntary, incentive-based and regulatory approaches, the role of Māori leadership and partnership, and the need for the strategy to remain useful through future legislative and institutional change.

Finalising the strategy is therefore only the next step. Detailed targets, delivery responsibilities, monitoring arrangements, investment priorities and sequencing will need to be developed through implementation planning with iwi/hapū, councils, landowners, community organisations, central government, industry and other regional partners. The engagement provides a solid basis for that work: it confirms support for the strategy’s direction, identifies the changes needed to make it more practical and accountable, and helps shift the focus from strategy development to coordinated regional action.