

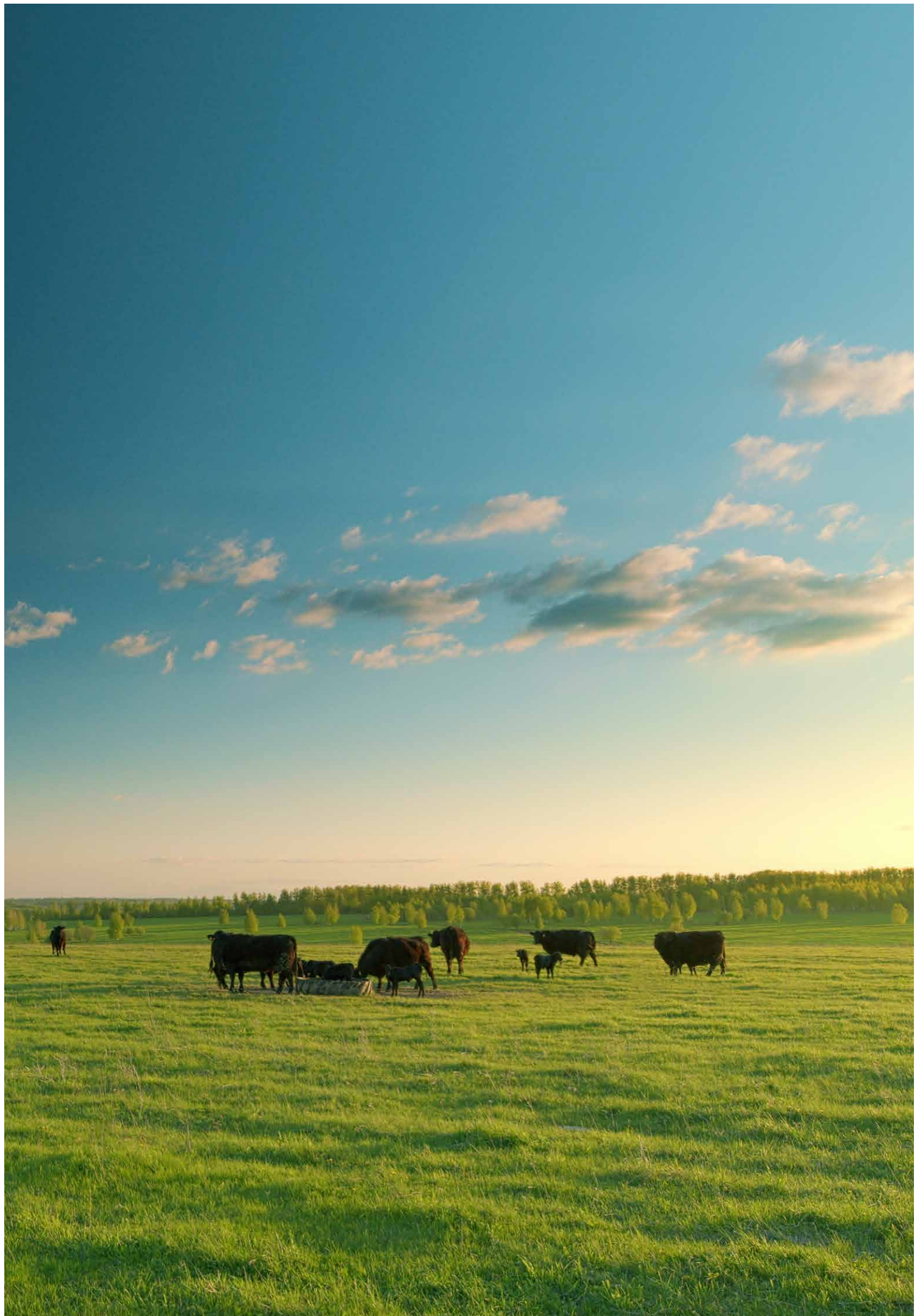
ANNUAL REPORT

2024-25



**THRIVING
SOUTHLAND**

*Tōnui ana te whenua. Tōnui ana te takata.
A thriving, prosperous land. A thriving, prosperous people.*



A message from Chair, Jeff Grant, and Project Lead, Richard Kyte

Welcome to the 2024-25 Thriving Southland Annual Report. This year's report marks a milestone moment, reflecting five years of Thriving Southland providing sustained, farmer and community-led action. Across Southland's diverse catchments, momentum continues to build with local energy, environmental commitment, and grassroots innovation at its core.

In the last five years, Thriving Southland has grown from supporting **18 to 37 Catchment Groups**, covering over **90% of the region**. More than **1,500 farmers** and community members have actively engaged in local projects.

These efforts range from sediment loss prioritisation mapping and pest control to water quality improvement and nitrogen loss modelling. Practical, locally driven, and increasingly recognised as models for national and international replication, these initiatives demonstrate what's possible when communities take the lead.

OUR HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- » The return of the **Southern AgriTech and Innovation Day**, attracting hundreds of farmers and rural professionals keen to explore sustainable farming, future pasture challenges, and emerging technologies.
- » Ongoing partnerships, with organisations such as **Bridgestone**, and a strong network of stakeholders supporting environmental outcomes, business resilience, and farmer wellbeing.
- » Standout catchment initiatives such as:
 - Edendale Aquifer Catchment Group's project nitrogen loss monitoring, modelling and mitigation
 - Waikaka Catchment Group's stream erosion mitigation mapping
 - Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Group's revival (pest management) project
 - Balfour Catchment Group's targeted solutions to local environmental challenges

As these projects, and many more, gain national attention, they reinforce the power of voluntary, science-backed, and locally informed collaboration, putting the control in the hands of the community.

Looking ahead, new resources like the **Winton Streams Wetland Directory** and the **Waiau High Resolution Mapping of Soil Management Units** projects will empower even more community action and learning.

The Thriving Southland Board has a strong focus on working with funders to build a long-term sustainable model to make sure the momentum built by our Catchment Groups can continue. With continued support from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), business partners, and local funders, we are well-positioned to support Groups in their focus on meaningful change.

HERE'S TO ANOTHER FIVE YEARS OF COLLABORATION, INNOVATION, AND GRASSROOTS LEADERSHIP!

How we work



Jeff Grant
Independent Chair



Simon Saunders
Vice Chair



Richard Kyte
Project Lead

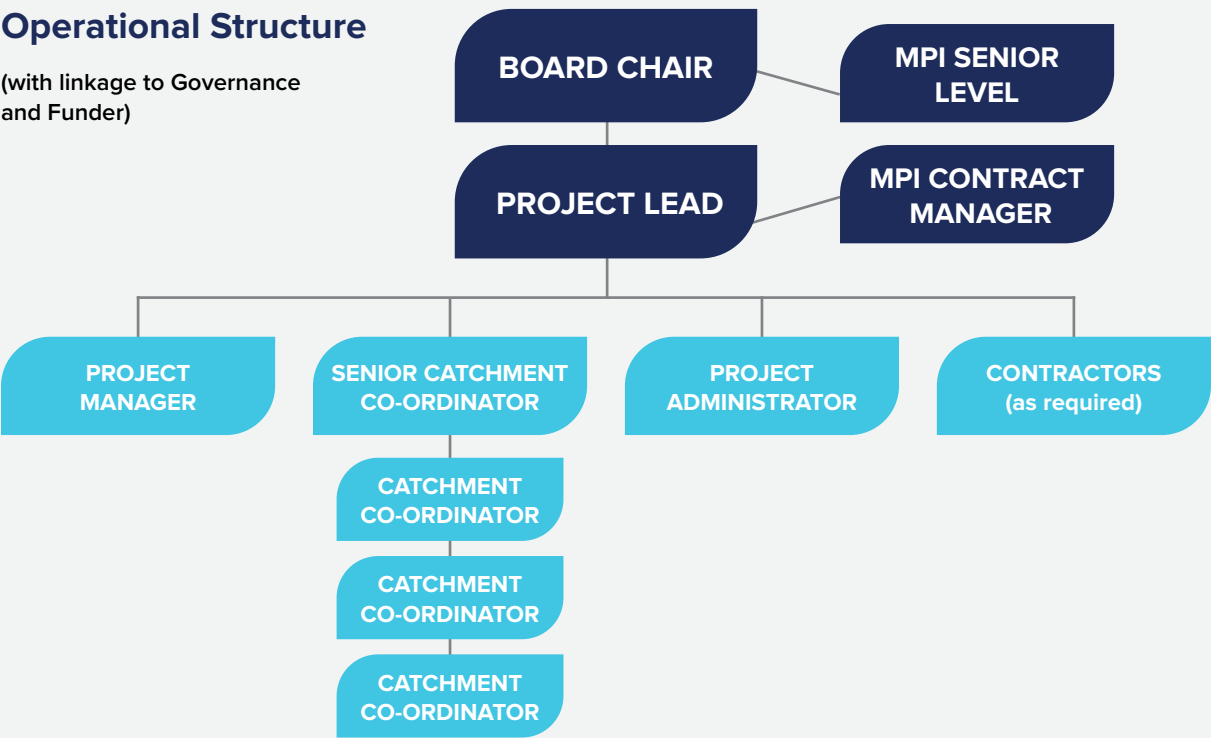
Board of Directors

In 2024, Kate Scott, Neil Gardyne and Bernadine Balle-Guilleux retired from the Board and Alexis Wadworth, Ed Pinckney and Simon Saunders were appointed as new Board members at the 2024 AGM.

Ewen Mathieson Pourakino Catchment	Edward Pinckney Te Anau Catchment	John White Lower Aparima Catchment	Alexis Wadworth Makarewa Headwaters Catchment	Rosie Hunter Associate Board Member
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Operational Structure

(with linkage to Governance and Funder)



Thriving Southland's purpose is to

INSPIRE COMMUNITY ACTION

Thriving Southland is underpinned by its values.

At Thriving Southland we do...



Brilliant

Brilliant is facing our challenges head on, being prepared to work hard for success, and always celebrating our achievements.



Collaborative

Our best collaboration comes from being honest, acting with integrity, and being prepared to learn from others. Through collaboration we will deliver results.



Community

Community is at the centre of everything we do. Our success comes from connecting others, and empowering communities to thrive for the future of our children.



Inspiration

We will inspire greatness through our passion. Our passion for Southland and its communities is at the heart of who we are.



Solutions

We encourage innovation, foster opportunity and seek outcomes through on the ground action.

Catchment Group members maintained that Thriving Southland contributes to farmers' improved sense of wellbeing.

Catchment Projects funded by the MPI Innovation and Acceleration Project

The Catchment Group projects have been wide ranging and exciting. Here are just some of the highlights:

- » The Waikawa Catchment Group hosted a speaker series on pest animal control, updates to farm environment plans, and seed sourcing, while the Lower Aparima Catchment Group organised a winter grazing tour. These initiatives all contribute to knowledge sharing.
- » The Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group hosted a plant growing workshop, planting session, and community BBQ, while the Otama and Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Groups each held a Christmas get-together, all aimed at bringing the community together after a particularly tough spring.
- » Environmental projects approved this year include the Titiroa Catchment Group initiative to test for native and invasive freshwater species, which will help prioritise fencing and habitat creation. Meanwhile, Makarewa Headwaters plans to trial ungulate exclusion plots to monitor forest recovery.

WINTON STREAM: Mid Oreti Catchment Group Marshalling the Best project

The Winton Stream 'Marshalling the Best' project focused on creating an online interactive GIS tool, designed to help landowners in the Winton Stream catchment plan for better water and land management at a paddock scale.

Almost half of the Winton Stream catchment used to be wetlands. Today, only 13 hectares are mapped as natural wetlands. Restoring wetland systems – both natural and constructed – would help improve water quality, reduce flooding, and enhance ecosystems by slowing water flow, trapping sediment, reducing nutrients, and supporting native biodiversity.

The tool was developed by the Mid Oreti Catchment Group and Collaborations and identifies areas where the natural topography suits the creation of wetlands and detainment bunds.

It maps flow paths and areas where water accumulates, with valuable information on catchments, erosion-prone land, and soils. It also identifies potential sites for wetlands, bunds, sediment traps, and other mitigations to improve water quality, and provides advice on the size of structures needed to effectively remove sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus. There is also access to a separate map with additional environmental datasets for freshwater farm planning. Plus, you can print any screen to incorporate into your farm and winter grazing plans.



Projects not funded by the Innovation and Acceleration Project

Alongside the Innovation and Acceleration project, Thriving Southland also receives funding from other sources to support catchment group activities.

Community Trust
South grant:
6 projects

Environment
Southland grant:
2 projects

Mountains to Sea,
Wai Connection:
7 projects

We are grateful to Community Trust South for their generous \$20,000 grant in February 2024. Thanks to their support, we wrapped up another six projects this year, bringing the total to 11 projects completed through this funding. The funding supported 15 Catchment Groups to get their projects off the ground, creating some incredible community-led environmental, learning and sharing opportunities.

With an Environment Southland grant we can support a range of environmental initiatives, including riparian planting, wetland development, sediment traps, and related activities. By the end of June 2025, two applications for funding had been submitted and approved. Both projects focus on developing wetlands that will contribute to improved water quality and habitat restoration.

A collaboration between the Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust, through their Wai Connection project, provided additional Catchment Coordinator support and project funding for the Waiau catchment. This partnership enabled seven projects across three Catchment Groups, focusing on topics such as pest control, factors affecting water quality within the catchment, and community engagement activities.

THE WAIU CATCHMENT PROJECT

The Waiau Catchment Project, including the Te Anau Basin, Orauea and Lower Waiau Catchment Groups, focuses on mapping the catchment's soils.

With guidance from a farmer-led 12-member committee representing three local Catchment Groups, this project aims to improve the accuracy of soil data through high-resolution maps that reflect the unique variability of our land.

Funded by Wai Connection and working with Land and Water Science, soil information and high-resolution soil maps are being created across the Waiau catchment. These maps will give farmers access to actionable, practical, paddock-scale insights that will optimise fertiliser application, improve soil health, enhance farm productivity, and support environmental sustainability.

The project kicked off in early 2025, and by the end of the project, the data has been ground truthed to create high-resolution soil maps available to the whole community.



Supporting Catchment Groups

THRIVING SOUTHLAND CONTINUES TO PROVIDE CATCHMENT GROUPS WITH TOOLS AND ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES THAT HELP THEM DELIVER ON THEIR OBJECTIVES.

Providing on-the-ground support has been instrumental in facilitating Catchment Group meetings and events, bringing people together to share information and build connections around a common goal.

Over the year there have been **166 catchment meetings** and events with more than **2,000 attendees**.

The Catchment Group Leaders Forum

Two forums were held during the year, each featuring guest presentations from outside the region. The first, in the Waikaka catchment, included a presentation from the Thomsons Catchment Project (Central Otago) on their wetland project. The second, held at West Range Station in the Orauea catchment, featured the Manawatu River Catchment Collective.



Agritourism Workshops in Tokanui and Lumsden

Two events brought together local farmers and tourism experts to explore the exciting opportunities of agritourism as a way to diversify farm businesses. AgriTourism NZ and Welcome Rock Trails delivered engaging workshops on how to establish and grow profitable agritourism ventures, current trends in agritourism, different business models, visitor statistics and insights into Southland. The workshops left attendees inspired and full of ideas.



Catchment Group Knowledge Sharing

In May, the Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Group hosted the Between the Domes Catchment Group to share their feral animal control work in the Hokonuis. The event highlighted how farmers are collaborating to tackle shared challenges, with valuable discussion, knowledge exchange, and support from the local community.





FOCUS ON SOUTHERN AGRITECH AND INNOVATION DAY 2025

The Southern AgriTech and Innovation Day, held in May 2025, brought together more than 300 farmers and rural professionals for a full day of presentations and exhibits showcasing current and emerging agricultural technology.

It was not just a glimpse into the evolving landscape, but also an eye-opening conversation about the present and the possibilities ahead. As one of this year's keynote speakers, Professor David Lamb, put it, *"this is a real crucible of lived experience in farming innovation"*.

As well as providing an insight into what the future holds, the day featured two dynamic panel discussions – one with agribusiness experts on unlocking more from cultivars and soils, and another farmer-led session on combining tech and teamwork to boost on-farm performance.

Hands-on 'Innovation Stations' gave attendees the chance to dive deeper into emerging solutions – from custom robotics and solar power to wearable agri-tech and smart pest control.

Robotic dogs rounding up livestock may be unimaginable today, but who would have thought that fenceless winter grazing or personalised chatbots predicting milk production trends and suggesting irrigation strategies would already be a reality.

AgResearch collaborator Mahgol Yousefidashliboroun captivated the audience with her speech *'Future or Fantasy? Agri-Chatbots for Kiwi Farmers'*.

AI once meant only one thing for farmers, but today it means so much more. As agriculture becomes more data-driven, AI chatbots are not just tools. ***"They are intelligent partners that enhance productivity, reduce labour costs, and support more strategic farm management,"*** said Mahgol.

Professor David Lamb highlighted how data-driven innovation was unlocking sustainability and profitability and overcoming challenges around cybersecurity and credibility with consumers. With the pace of change accelerating, farmers in the deep south are invested in taking their businesses into the future and beyond.

We are especially grateful to our sponsors who made it possible to deliver an awesome event and create a space for learning, connection and action.



Our Resources and Science

INDEPENDENT FEEDBACK ON THRIVING SOUTHLAND

In December 2024, Thriving Southland released the results of the Pragmatica independent review.

The report revealed the significant impact of Thriving Southland's support for the region's Catchment Groups, and highlighted how Thriving Southland's approach has empowered farmers, fostered stronger ties with scientists, and encouraged the use of sustainable farming practices across the region.

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDED:

- » **Enhanced capability:** 86% of respondents said Thriving Southland has helped build their ability to drive change.
- » **Improved connections:** 89% reported better relationships with scientists and experts, turning Catchment Groups into hubs for shared learning.
- » **Meaningful change:** From 2020 to 2024, the percentage of Catchment Group members using science to guide farm decisions increased from 14% to 83%.

The report highlighted that Thriving Southland's backbone support has created a foundation for sustainable progress and showed that it has been driving positive change while empowering Catchment Groups to build stronger connections, improve decision-making, and create lasting impact across the region.



THE 2025 ANNUAL SURVEY

In March 2025, Thriving Southland's fifth annual survey was completed by 210 Southland farmers, Catchment Group members, and stakeholders. It gathered information on environmental practices, knowledge and understanding of Thriving Southland's role and key topics of interest.

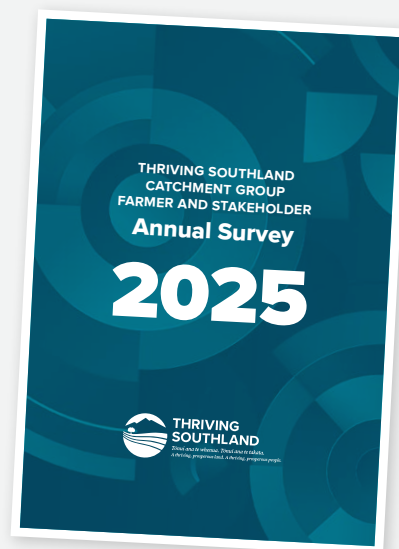
The survey highlighted that Southland farmers are expanding their priorities beyond profitability and productivity goals to emphasise animal health and waste reduction, while implementing critical environmental management practices including source area protection, improved fertiliser management, and paddock selection strategies.

Most farmers have developed, or are in the process of developing, Farm Environment Plans, and they continue to monitor key indicators such as fertiliser placement, rainfall, and soil conditions.

While farmers rate their individual farm water quality highly (90% as excellent or good), only 12% view Southland's overall waterways favourably, creating a disconnect between personal and regional water quality perceptions.

Optimism has increased significantly with 44% of respondents feeling positive about the future (up from 32%), and community support remains strong, with over 60% providing assistance to fellow farmers. Uncertainty about regulatory requirements has increased, with 66% of respondents seeking clearer guidance on rules and implementation timelines.

Catchment Groups continue to provide welcoming, collaborative environments, and farmers express pride in their sustainability efforts and quality production outcomes.





LEARNING FROM SUCCESSFUL CATCHMENT GROUPS

Independent research commissioned by Thriving Southland revealed critical success factors that enable Catchment Groups to build strong community participation and achieve tangible environmental improvements.

The study, conducted by Scarlatti in March 2025, examined four successful Southland Catchment Group projects: Understanding your Landscape's Resilience (Mataura Catchment Group), Targeted Solutions to Balfour's Environmental Challenges (Balfour Catchment Group), Understanding the Movement of Nutrients (Edendale Aquifer Group), and Carbon Neutral Dipton (Greater Dipton Catchment Group).

THE RESEARCH IDENTIFIED SEVERAL PRACTICAL INSIGHTS FOR CATCHMENT GROUPS:

- » Start with willing participants but don't abandon those who need more time
- » Keep farmers at the centre of decision-making as projects grow and attract external support
- » Invest in the right people - particularly catchment coordinators who are trusted by the community and skilled at facilitation
- » Make science hands-on with farmers involved in data collection and solution development
- » Plan for extension early to spread impact beyond the core group

The research also highlighted barriers that successful Groups face, particularly regulatory hurdles that can delay or prevent environmental improvements.

The research emphasised that when communities are empowered to lead with solutions that work for their land and water, supported by credible science and the right people, they can achieve remarkable environmental outcomes. The key is patience, trust, and keeping farmers at the heart of the process.



Building relationships

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Mataura Catchment Group leaders had the opportunity to meet and talk with the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) in July 2024. The PCE presented their report on the challenges of land use change and the Groups shared learnings from their projects.

The Annual General Meeting on 20 November 2024 at Otautau, featured guest Speaker Neal Wallace, senior reporter from Farmers Weekly. Neal shared valuable insights from his recent overseas travels, where he explored consumer trends, key customer expectations in dairy and meat production, and the impact of global political shifts on trade.



As part of our work with trusted partners, in early 2025 Thriving Southland signed a pilot sponsorship with Bridgestone. Bridgestone's focus on sustainability and reliability aligns with our work supporting Catchment Groups, environmental initiatives, and rural resilience, helping us continue delivering projects, connecting communities, and driving positive change across the region.



The Thriving Southland Stakeholder Breakfast in March 2025 celebrated five years of Thriving Southland and provided updates on the work of Southland Catchment Groups and community initiatives. Jeff Grant shared valuable insights on carbon as New Zealand's key market indicator, and the Edendale Aquifer and Pourakino Catchment Groups highlighted the impact of community-led action.

In June, MPI Director-General Ray Smith, and Thriving Southland Independent Chair Jeff Grant, signed a funding agreement to support Thriving Southland for the 24/25 year.



Communications and Marketing

THRIVING SOUTHLAND COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Thriving Southland's communications activities continue to go from strength to strength, with the brand now firmly recognised across Southland and increasingly beyond. Engagement with farmers, Catchment Groups, and stakeholders in and out of the region remains strong and continues to grow.

Both Thriving Southland and the region's Catchment Groups are well established as trusted voices, backed by a dynamic mix of channels, from the website, videos, monthly newsletter, and social media campaigns through to radio, interviews, and media coverage. With a new Instagram account launched in August 2024 and the Catchment Convos podcast debuting in October, Thriving Southland now has two new successful platforms to share stories and insights from across the region.



NEWSLETTER

- » Subscriptions up by 6%
- » Open rate almost double industry norms
- » Click-through rate almost 5 x benchmark
- » By June 2025, newsletter subscriptions had grown from 1,491 to 1,571, a 6% increase
- » Engagement well above industry norms, with an average open rate of 42.1% (compared to the 15-25% industry benchmark) and a click-through rate of 10.1% (well above the 2.8% benchmark)



MARKETING

- » Meta advertising has led to 7,414 engagements and over 1.24 million impressions
- » Average click-through rate of 2.18% compared to the industry norm of 0.89%
- » Delivered wide range of targeted digital campaigns



MEDIA COVERAGE

- » A story every two weeks or Thriving Southland in the headlines every fortnight
- » Featured on local and national radio, print, and digital media



WEBSITE

- » 32,300 website visits
- » 11,100 clicks from Google search results
- » The homepage continues to be the most visited page, with the new Catchment Convos podcast page already ranking second
- » Dedicated Catchment Group pages are drawing strong interest too, with Mid Oreti receiving the highest number of visits, followed by Waiau & Upper Oreti, and Upper Mataura



FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

- » Reached 320,600 on Facebook and 22,000 on Instagram



RADIO

- » Reaching 10,000 listeners on The Muster
- » Each segment was also shared on social media and uploaded to the website, extending reach beyond the 10,000+ daily listeners who tune in live



PODCAST

- » More than 300 listeners per episode and 1405 downloads since launch in October 2024



Statement of Service Performance

Thriving Southland supports and enables the community to create and lead innovations that build community wellbeing, environmental improvements and education and research across rural – and in many cases urban – communities. It all helps build the movement towards change in agriculture and farming. We do this by supporting Catchment Groups with funding for their projects, their meetings and events that bring people together.

Thriving Southland also invests in useful and targeted data-led science, modelling and case studies for increased learning and knowledge across Southland's agricultural sector.

We use a range of different communication channels, including a strong focus on collaboration, to ensure information, tools, advice and learnings are shared between rural and urban communities.

	2025	2024
Projects Projects have ranged from small projects, where the objectives were to support engagement and connecting, through to riparian mitigation and monitoring native bush recovery.	» 25 projects approved	» 23 projects approved
Community Wellbeing Enabling and supporting catchment group meetings and events which bring people together with a common goal and to inform and connect people.	» 166 catchment meetings and events » Total attendance of 2,170	» 165 catchment meetings and events » Total attendance of 2,284
Education and Learning Providing science reports, information, tools and workshops to Catchment Groups that enables informed decisions.	» Workshops x 20 » Field days x 12 » Catchment Group Leader Forum x 2 » Southern AgriTech and Innovation day with keynote speakers, farmer panel, workshops and exhibitors » Report sharing lessons from catchment groups that successfully engaged their communities and achieved environmental outcomes	» Workshops x 29 » Field days x 14 » Catchment Group Leader Forum x 1 » Southern AgriTech and Innovation day with keynote speakers, farmer panel, workshops and exhibitors » Exploring positive family farm succession report » Value of Carbon Sequestration for Tōtara Forests report
Communication Different channels set up to effectively communicate with catchment members, communities and stakeholders.	» Facebook reach 105,600 » Monthly newsletter 1,561 with open rate of 33% » Website page views 3.5k	» Facebook reach 56,300 » Monthly newsletter 1,497 with open rate of 45% » Website page views 3.1k

Financials

Full Financial Statements

The full audited Financial Statements for the year ending 30 June 2025 for Thriving Southland have been summarised for this Annual Report.

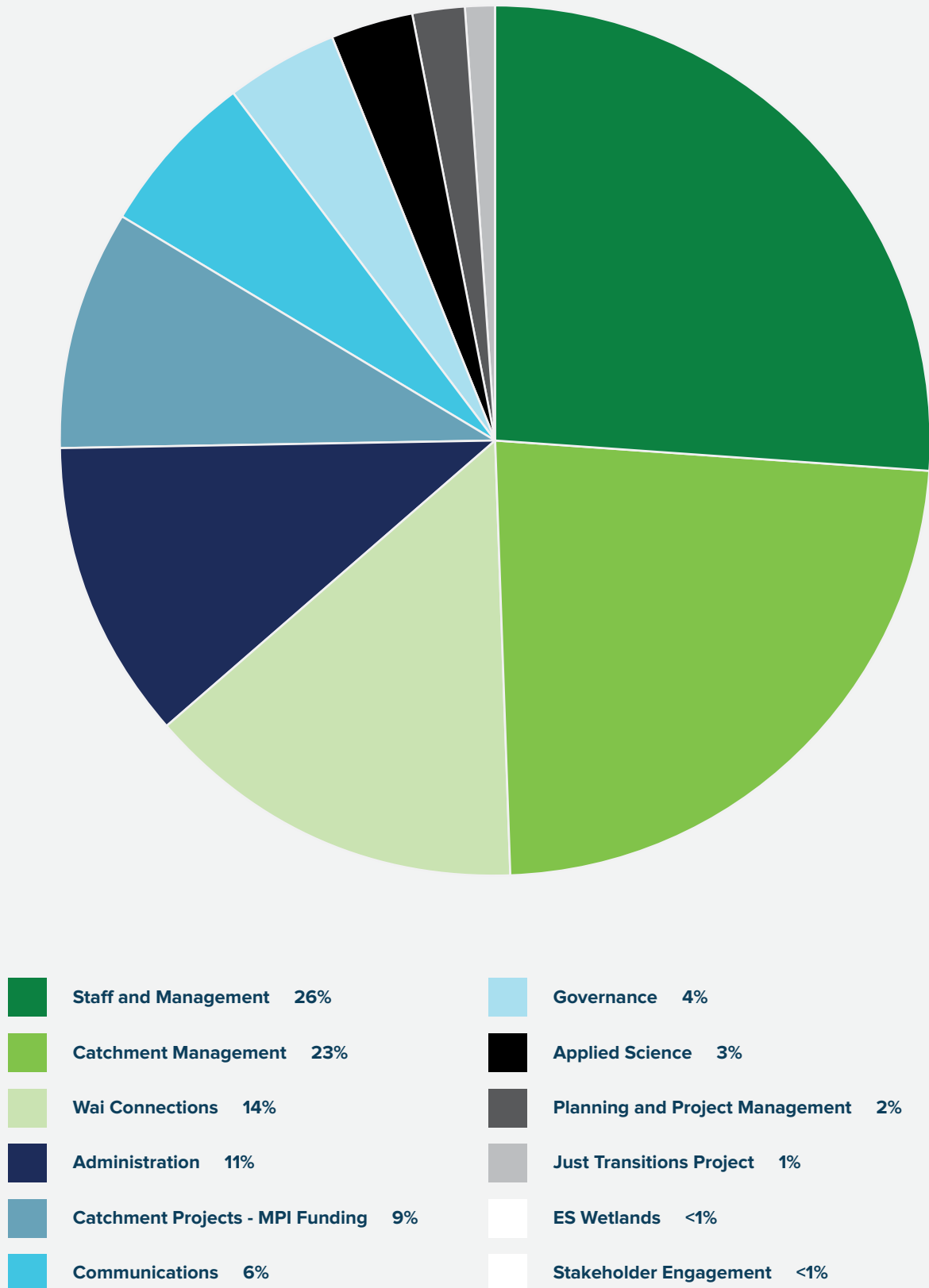
The Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with Tier 2 not-for-profit PBE Standards: The Incorporated Society qualifies for a lower reporting Tier 3 but has elected to 'opt-up' into Tier 2. The full Financial Statements have been audited and were authorised for issue on 12 Nov 2025.

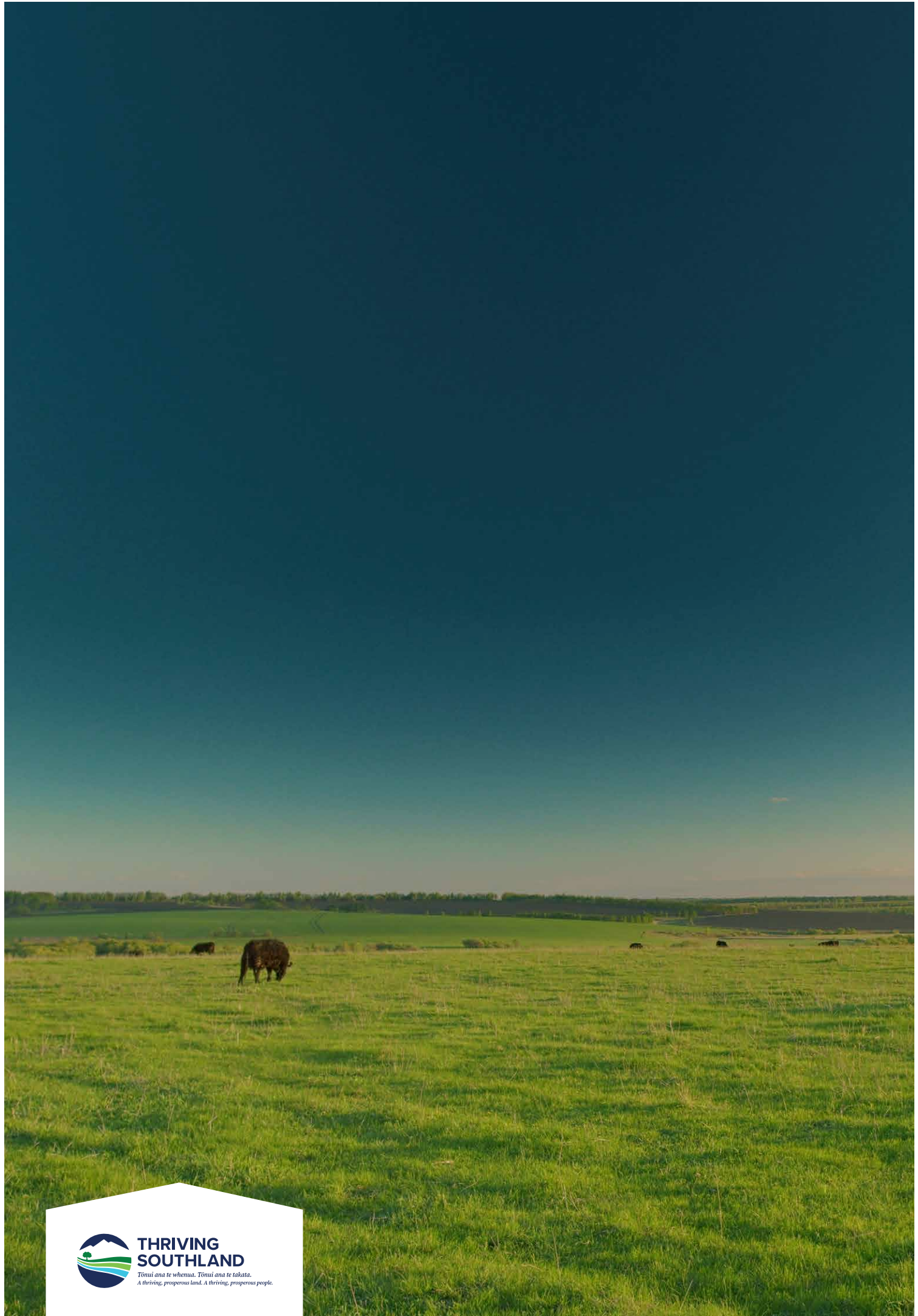
This summarised financial report has not been audited and may not contain sufficient information for a full understanding of the financial position of Thriving Southland, but copies of the full Financial Statements and the auditors report can be obtained from the Thriving Southland Office or from the Charities Services website following the AGM.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE	2025	2024
Income		
Donations Received	4,086	
Ministry for Primary Industries Grant	1,200,000	1,200,000
Agmardt Contract Income	-	51,154
Wai Connection	197,750	3,890
ES Wetland Funding	78,333	-
MBIE Contract Income (Just Transitions)	12,247	44,913
Sponsorship	6,000	7,800
Our Land and Water National Science Challenge	-	18,905
Project Management Fees	60,015	-
Interest	538	690
Other Income	-	508
Total Income	1,558,969	1,327,859
Expenses		
Catchment Projects - MPI Funding	131,885	198,247
Agmardt Project	-	16,602
Just Transitions Project	12,247	77,495
Our Land and Water Project	-	1,360
Wai Connections	194,092	
ES Wetlands	1,684	
Catchment Management	330,325	419,504
Applied Science	42,708	27,964
Communications	82,139	62,235
Stakeholder Engagement	5,425	2,743
Governance	57,582	69,540
Staff and Management	375,824	268,512
Planning and Project Management	27,565	13,415
Administration	162,772	148,057
Total Expenses	1,424,247	1,305,674
Net Surplus (Deficit)	134,722	22,185
FINANCIAL POSITION		
Current Assets	1,173,298	713,295
Current Liabilities	924,767	599,487
Net Assets	248,531	113,809

Financials

2025 Expenses





**THRIVING
SOUTHLAND**

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A thriving, prosperous land. A thriving, prosperous people.*