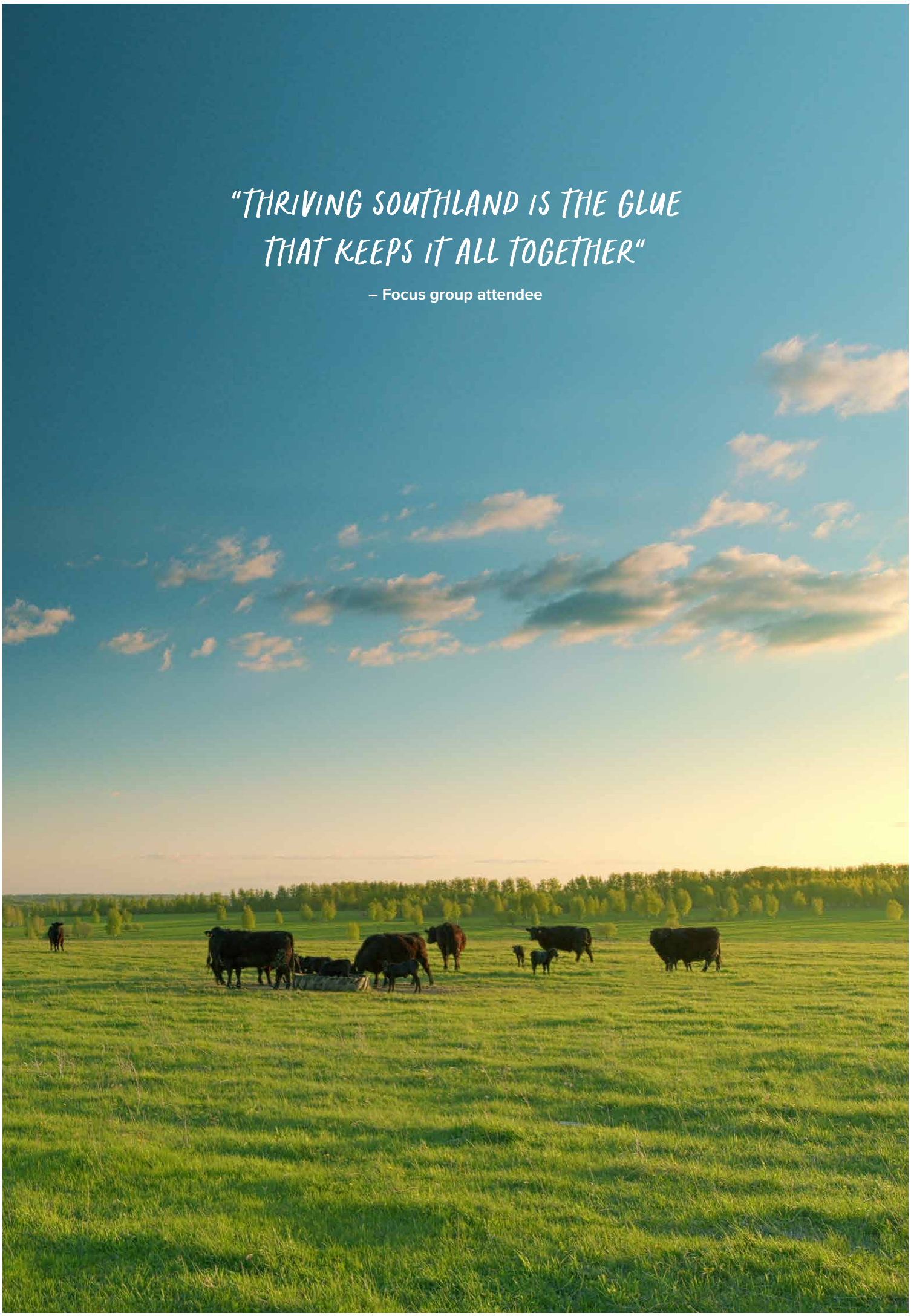
ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26



THRIVING SOUTHLAND

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


"THRIVING SOUTHLAND IS THE GLUE
THAT KEEPS IT ALL TOGETHER"
– Focus group attendee

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

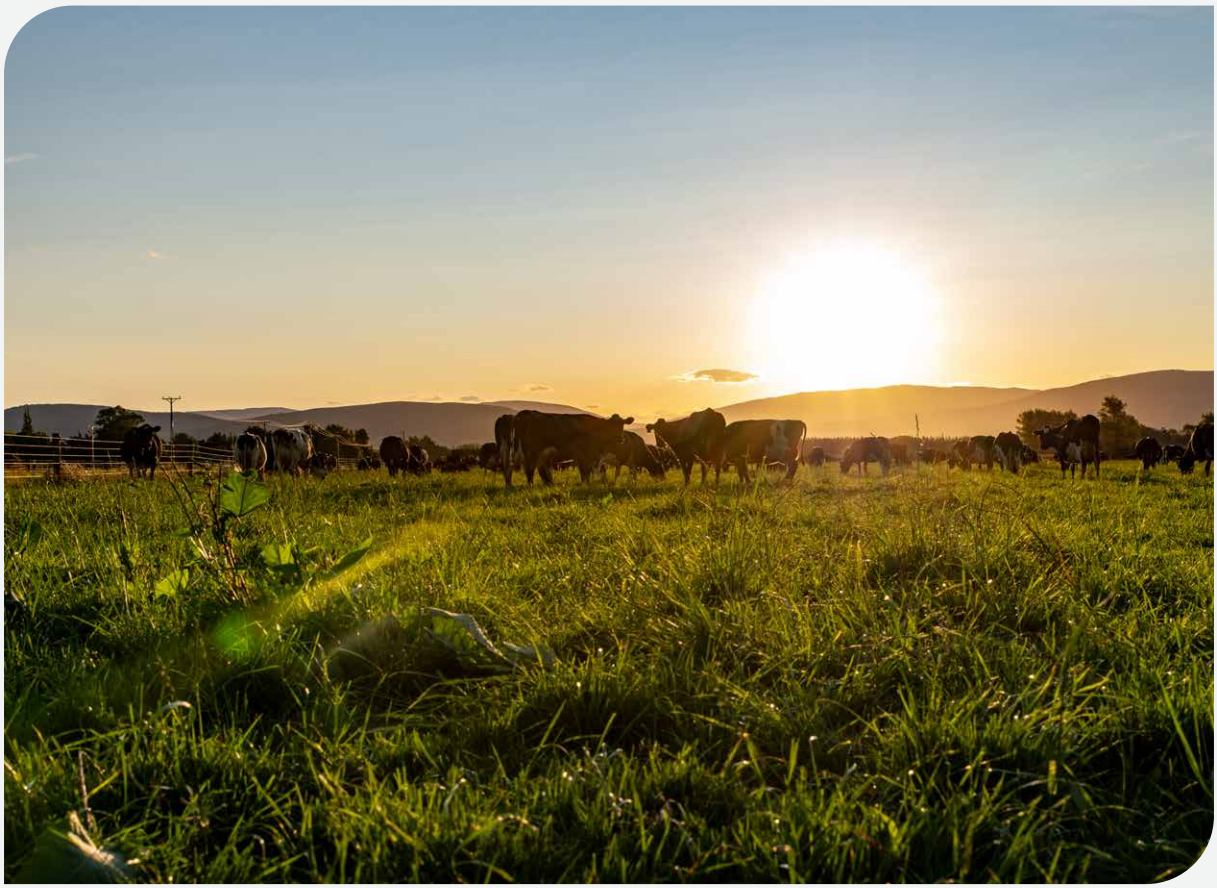
Welcome to the 2025-26 Thriving Southland Annual Report. This year has been one of continued momentum for Thriving Southland and the Catchment Groups we support. Across Southland, communities continue to lead practical, locally driven initiatives that respond to the challenges and opportunities within their catchments, supported by strong partnerships, knowledge sharing and a growing network of people committed to positive environmental outcomes.

Over the past year, Thriving Southland has continued to support 37 Catchment Groups across the region, providing the coordination, resources, funding, education and connections they need to progress their priorities. From wetland restoration and water quality monitoring to pest management, farm planning and community engagement, Catchment Groups continue to turn local knowledge and ideas into practical action.

A significant milestone this year was securing a new four-year funding agreement with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), providing support for Thriving Southland from 2026 to 2030. This gives us greater certainty to continue supporting Catchment Groups and building the capability and connections needed to sustain community-led action over the longer term.

OUR HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- The return of Everything to Gain in May, bringing together farmers, rural professionals and industry leaders to explore the opportunities and challenges facing New Zealand's food and fibre sector in an increasingly complex global marketplace.
- Welcoming more than 300 visitors to the Thriving Southland site during Southern Field Days, providing an opportunity to connect with landowners, rural professionals, Catchment Group members and the wider community.
- Continued investment in knowledge sharing and collaboration, including the Catchment Group Leaders Forum, stakeholder events, webinars and opportunities for Catchment Groups to connect with each other and learn from initiatives across the region.
- Strong partnerships with organisations including Environment Southland, MPI and the Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust, supporting Catchment Coordinators and practical community-led projects across Southland.
- New and ongoing initiatives including the Upper Aparima Catchment Group's pest monitoring and impact project, the Awarua Catchment Group's waterfowl and water quality project, and a range of projects focused on wetlands, biodiversity, water quality and animal pest management.



We have also continued to invest in the tools and resources available to Catchment Groups. The development of a central ArcGIS platform is making it easier to store, manage and share GIS data and StoryMaps, while the recent redevelopment of the Thriving Southland website has streamlined our content and navigation and improved the experience for people looking for information and resources.

Our communications channels continue to provide an important way to share the work happening across the region, with strong engagement across social media. Through our website, newsletter, videos, Catchment Convos podcast and events, we are continuing to connect people with the stories, knowledge and opportunities emerging from Southland's catchments.

The strength of Thriving Southland lies in the people behind it. Catchment Groups continue to demonstrate what can be achieved when farmers and communities have the support, information and connections to identify local priorities and take action. Our role is to help create the conditions for that action to succeed and to ensure the lessons and successes from one catchment can benefit others.

As we look ahead, the new MPI funding agreement provides a strong foundation for the next four years. We remain focused on supporting Catchment Groups to build capability, strengthen connections and deliver practical outcomes that matter to their communities and to Southland.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to the Catchment Groups, farmers, community members, partners, funders and stakeholders who continue to contribute their time, knowledge and commitment to this work. We look forward to building on what has been achieved and continuing this important work together.

How we work



Jeff Grant

Independent Chair



Simon Saunders

Vice Chair



Richard Kyte

Project Lead

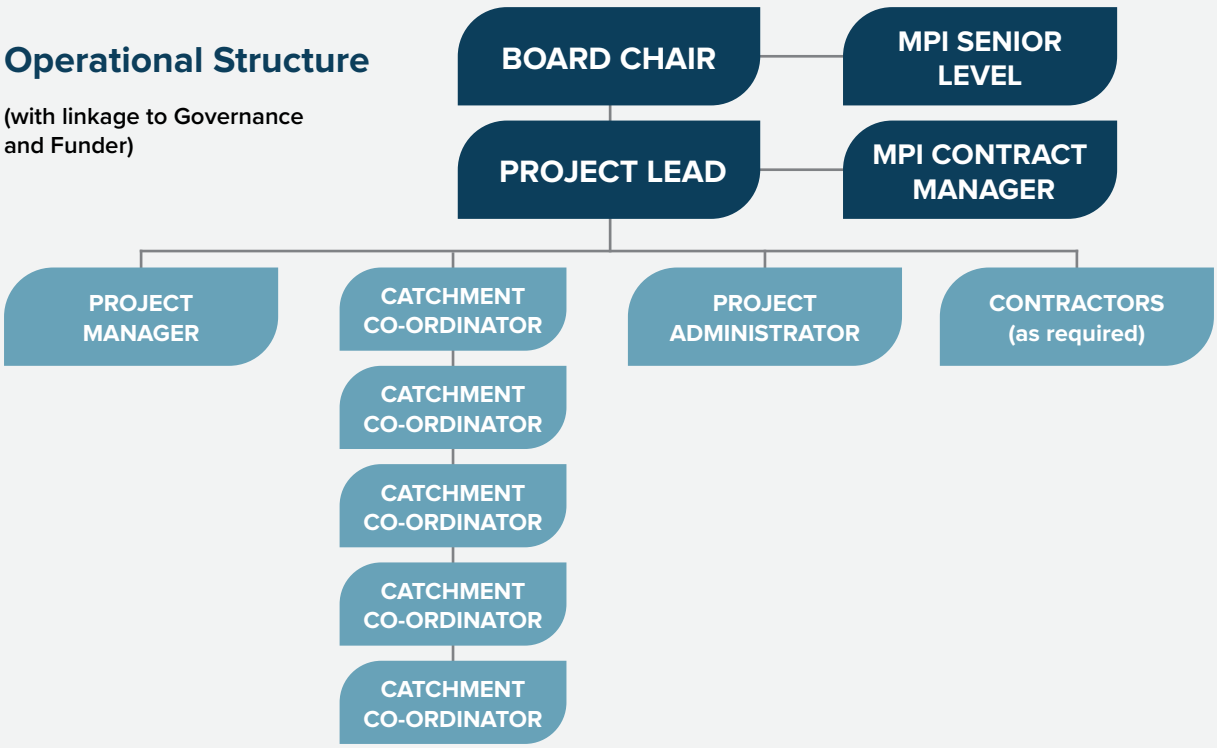
Board of Directors

In 2025, Ewen Mathieson retired from the Board, and Clare Officer was appointed as a new Board member at the 2025 AGM.

Clare Officer	Edward Pinckney	John White	Alexis Wadworth	Rosie Hunter
Dipton Catchment	Te Anau Catchment	Lower Aparima Catchment	Makarewa Headwaters Catchment	Associate Board Member

Operational Structure

(with linkage to Governance and Funder)



Thriving Southland Strategy: 2025–2029

This strategy outlines the key pillars that will guide Thriving Southland 2025 to 2029. It reflects our commitment to leadership, economic resilience, strong connections, and deep community engagement.

OUR VISION: Thriving people, thriving environment – Thriving Southland.

OUR PURPOSE: To inspire community action.

WHAT WE DO:

Ground-up with a flexible and adaptable approach.

Support proactive action, on-the-ground in Murihiku.

Connect and collaborate.

Connect farmers to future trends and support them to seek out information to innovate.

Build inclusivity with rural and urban communities.

Empower communities to deliver.

OUR PILLARS:

1. Lead

- Ground-up influence on policy – acknowledge good environmental practice reduces policy pressure.
- Driven by current science and strategic foresight. Promotes 'tools, not rules' to empower communities.
- Recognised domestically and internationally.
- Leading farmers and growers are part of their Catchment Group.
- A resilient funding model to support long-term impact.

2. Connect

- Thriving Southland is a connector, storyteller, and influencer.
- Strong focus on extension and facilitation.
- Sharing trusted knowledge and credible advocacy.
- Building status as the 'go-to organisation' – acknowledged expertise.
- Creating and maintaining long-term strategic partnerships

3. Engage

- Catchment Groups driving real, measurable change.
- Defining community catchments – understanding 'who are we.
- Encouraging involvement and ensuring retention.
- Focusing on projects proven to drive engagement.

Catchment Projects funded by MPI Innovation Acceleration Project

The Catchment Group projects have covered a diverse range of initiatives, from environmental restoration and water quality improvements to sustainable farming, community resilience and engagement. Here are a few highlights:

- ACE, Otama and Greater Dipton Catchment Groups hosted Catchment Emergency Preparedness workshops to strengthen the resilience of households, farms and communities in the event of an unexpected disruption or emergency.
- The Awarua Catchment Group held its inaugural meeting to foster community engagement, followed by an industry insights bus tour that provided members with a deeper understanding of their catchment. Meanwhile, the Edendale Aquifer Group, South Coast Catchment Group and Otama Catchment Group hosted end-of-year and Christmas events, bringing communities together after a challenging spring.
- A number of projects approved focused on water quality, biodiversity or animal pest management, including Dipton Catchment Group's water testing drop-in session, Otama Catchment Group's Environmental Works project, creating tailored plans for wetland sites in the catchment, ACE Catchment Group's Inanga spawning workshop and Otamita Catchment Group's Pest Control in Action project.



Upper Aparima Catchment Group Possum Monitoring and Impact Project

This project is a community-led initiative designed to support landowners and stakeholders in the Upper Aparima Catchment to better understand the scale, distribution and impact of pest animals.

While the group-led control programme will initially target possums due to their feasibility and cost-effectiveness, the project's monitoring scope will include all major pest species present in the catchment. The project will complement the physical pest control programme by:

- Establishing a baseline of pest animal populations and densities across the catchment. This baseline information will help the group apply for funding from other community funders in the future.
- Assessing the environmental, social and economic impacts of these populations.
- Engaging the community through surveys and shared data to build understanding and drive collective action.



Awarua Catchment Group Waterfowl and Water Quality Project

Formed in early 2026, the Awarua Catchment Group represents the catchment area directly south and east of Invercargill, encompassing a unique mix of urban, rural, industrial and conservation land.

The Awarua Catchment Group is focused on understanding the scale and seasonal patterns of geese and black swan populations in Awarua Bay and the New River Estuary, and assessing their potential impacts on water quality and the surrounding catchment, including implications for local farming systems.

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.

Environment Southland grant:

11 PROJECTS

Mountains to Sea, Wai Connection:

4 PROJECTS



Funded through a grant from Environment Southland to Thriving Southland, the initiative overall supported 13 practical, community-led projects that improved environmental outcomes at both property and catchment scale. Funded projects included constructed wetlands, riparian planting, sediment traps and other practical mitigations that reflected the principle of "the right mitigation in the right place", while helping to build community engagement and environmental stewardship throughout Southland.

The partnership with the Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust continued this year through the Wai Connection project, which allowed for the continuation of Catchment Coordinator support and project funding. This collaboration enabled four community-led projects across three Catchment Groups, focusing on pest management, understanding water quality influences within the catchment, and wetland enhancement.



Supporting Catchment Groups

Thriving Southland continues to equip Catchment Groups with the tools, resources and engagement opportunities needed to achieve their objectives.

Ongoing on-the-ground support has played a key role in facilitating meetings and events, bringing communities together to share knowledge, strengthen connections and work collaboratively towards common goals.

Over the year there have been 131 catchment meetings and events with more than 1,400 attendees.

SOME EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

The Catchment Group Leaders Forum

At the Catchment Group Forum held during the year, the Mid Oreti Catchment Group showcased its 'Marshalling the Best' tool and native nursery initiative. The tool helps landowners in the Winton Stream Catchment identify the most effective locations for wetlands, runoff detention bunds and sediment traps. Attendees also heard from local vegetable producer Wilson's Veges, who shared insights into their journey as a Southland grower and the opportunities and challenges of food production in the region.

Making sense of the rules webinar

Landpro was engaged to run a practical webinar designed to help local farmers understand what the current regulations around cultivation, winter grazing and wetlands mean for their farms.









Southland Christmas Competition

The annual Christmas display competition celebrated its fifth year, attracting a variety of creative entries from individuals and Catchment Groups across Southland. Supported by generous contributions of prizes from stakeholders, the competition helped foster community engagement and spread festive cheer throughout rural Southland.

Manawatū visit

Building on the Manawatū team's visit to Southland in 2025, a reciprocal visit north was undertaken by two Catchment Group farmers involved in key projects, accompanied by a Catchment Coordinator and Project Lead. The visit provided valuable opportunities to exchange knowledge and learn from a range of catchment initiatives, with particular interest in a wetland restoration project and insights shared on water quality monitoring results. Farmers described the experience as highly beneficial, offering practical ideas and perspectives that can be applied within Southland.

Everything to Gain – What Really Matters: Paddocks to Markets

Everything to Gain returned in May 2026, bringing together farmers, rural professionals and industry leaders from across Southland to explore the opportunities and challenges facing New Zealand's food and fibre sector in an increasingly complex global marketplace.

Through a series of expert presentations and discussions from speakers including Vangelis Vitalis, Jacqueline Rowarth, Hamish Marr, Jarred Mair and Lee Matheson, attendees gained valuable insights into changing consumer expectations, global market trends, sustainability requirements and emerging technologies shaping the future of agriculture.

A key theme throughout the day was the importance of maintaining New Zealand's reputation for producing high-quality, trusted food and fibre products. Presenters highlighted how on-farm practices, environmental stewardship and strong traceability systems are becoming increasingly important for securing market access and long-term value. Discussions also emphasised the need for producers and rural businesses to remain adaptable and responsive to changing market signals, evolving supply chains and global economic influences.

The event reinforced Southland's strengths in food production while highlighting opportunities to leverage innovation, technology and data-driven decision-making to improve productivity, resilience and profitability. Attendees left with a greater understanding of the global forces influencing the sector and the steps needed to ensure Southland remains competitive, relevant and well positioned for future growth.







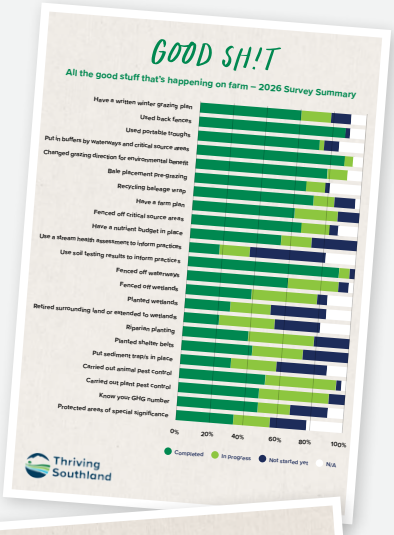
Our Resources and Science

GOOD SH!T LIST

Southland farmers have been hard at work making positive changes on their farms, and we're proud to share some of the results.

From using soil testing to guide management decisions to establishing waterway and critical source area buffers and installing back fences, farmers across Southland are continuing to make meaningful improvements. Here's a snapshot of what's been happening over the past year. What's on your list?

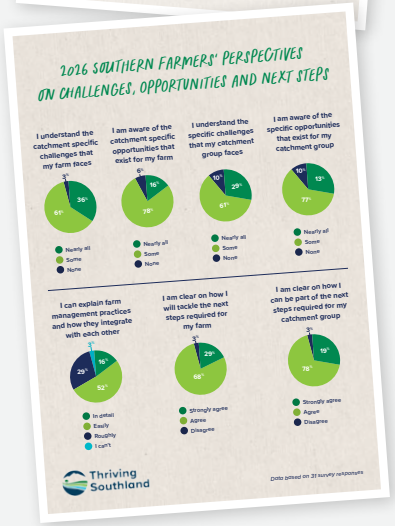
To read the full survey summary, visit
thrivingsouthland.co.nz/annual-reports-and-surveys



FARMERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND NEXT STEPS

A 2026 survey of Southern farmers found strong awareness of catchment-specific challenges and opportunities, with most respondents indicating they understand both the issues facing their farms and catchment groups. The results also showed a high level of confidence in farm management practices and a clear willingness to take the next steps on both farm and catchment initiatives. These findings reinforce the importance of continuing to provide practical tools, knowledge-sharing opportunities and on-the-ground support to help farmers and catchment groups turn awareness into action.

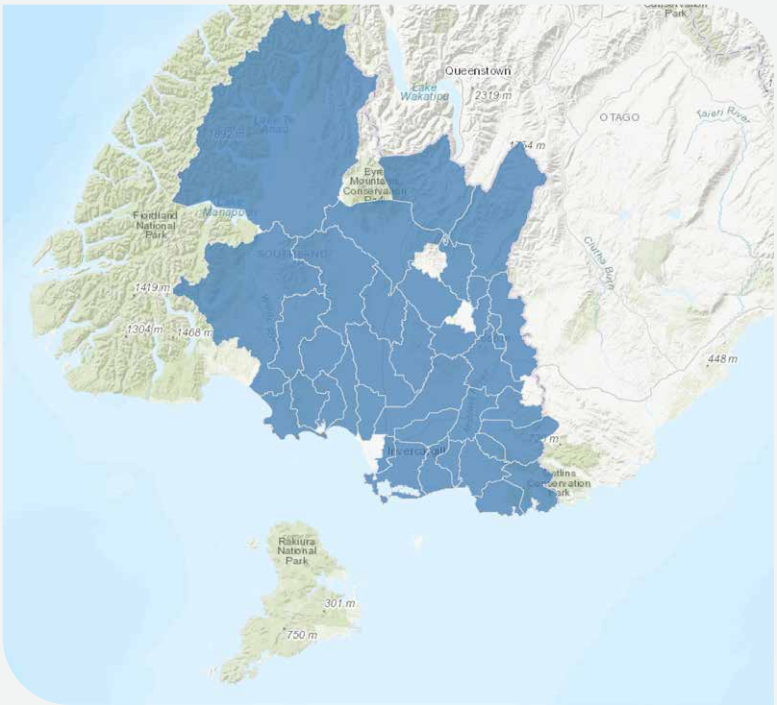
To read the full survey summary,
thrivingsouthland.co.nz/annual-reports-and-surveys



CENTRAL DATA PLATFORM

Thriving Southland obtained an ArcGIS licence, providing a central platform for the storage, management and sharing of Catchment Group GIS data and StoryMaps. This allows Catchment Groups to showcase their projects, share outcomes and tell the stories behind their work in a visually engaging and accessible way.

For more details on these remarkable projects and additional initiatives led by Southland Catchment Groups, visit
thrivingsouthland.co.nz/projects



Building relationships

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

In February 2026, the Thriving Southland team welcomed more than 300 visitors to its site over the three days of Southern Field Days at Waimumu. It was encouraging to connect with both existing Catchment Group members and those new to our work, providing a valuable opportunity to engage with landowners, rural professionals and the wider community, while showcasing the initiatives and impact of Catchment Groups across Southland.





A stakeholder breakfast was held in April 2026, with more than 40 rural professionals and stakeholders attending to hear updates and a presentation from the Mid Oreti Catchment Group on its nursery and Marshalling the Best project.



The Annual General Meeting, held on 12 November 2025, featured two Catchment Groups sharing their recent projects: the Waiau Catchment Group's Soil Mapping Project and the Waikawa Catchment Group's Slow the Flow Project.



Communications and Marketing

Thriving Southland Communications Activities

Thriving Southland's communications activity continued to build awareness and engagement across Southland during 2025-26, strengthening connections with farmers, Catchment Groups, rural professionals, stakeholders and the wider community. Our established mix of channels provided effective ways to share stories, insights and practical information from across the region. During the year, we also improved how people access this content, with a full revamp of the Thriving Southland website to streamline content and navigation, improve the user experience and make information and resources easier to find.

Our social media presence also continued to grow, with the recently launched Thriving Southland LinkedIn account performing particularly well in terms of engagement among rural professionals. Alongside Facebook and Instagram, the Catchment Convos podcast, newsletter, Muster interviews and media activity continue to extend the reach of stories and insights from Catchment Groups and the wider Thriving Southland network. Overall, communications continue to play an important role in showcasing the work happening across Southland, sharing knowledge and connecting people with initiatives, resources and opportunities.

Newsletter

- Subscription growth from 1,571 to 1,622 – that's a 3.2% increase
- Average open rate: 34.05% (compared to the 15-25% industry benchmark)
- Average click rate: 1.95%

Marketing

- Meta advertising has led to 8.4k engagements and over 632k impressions
- Average click-through rate of 3.5% compared to the industry norm of 0.89%
- Delivered a wide range of targeted digital campaigns, from community event promotions to recruitment drives

Media Coverage

- Continued coverage of Thriving Southland and Catchment Group activity across regional and national media
- Stories and interviews featured across local and national radio, print and digital media
- Ongoing media interest has helped raise awareness of the work being led by Catchment Groups across Southland

Radio

- 7 radio interviews on Hokonui's The Muster
- Each Muster interview segment was also shared on social media and uploaded to the website, extending reach beyond the 10,000+ daily listeners who tune in live

Website

- 21k website visits
- The homepage continues to be the most visited page, with the widely promoted Everything to Gain event page ranking second
- Other trending pages drawing strong interest include Catchment Convos, About Us, Catchment Groups and Catchment Factsheets

Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn

- 3146 Facebook followers, 182 Instagram followers and 113 LinkedIn connections
- 5.7k content interactions and 6.1k link clicks on Facebook
- 677 content interactions and 431 link clicks on Instagram
- 6,378 impressions on LinkedIn with an impressive 26.3% click-through rate

Podcast

- 11 Catchment Convos podcast episodes with over 2500 downloads and more than 300 listeners per episode





Statement of Service Performance

Thriving Southland supports and enables the community to create and lead innovations that build community wellbeing, improve the environment, and support education and research across rural – and, in many cases, urban – communities. It all helps build momentum for change in agriculture and farming.

We do this by supporting Catchment Groups with funding for their projects, meetings and events that bring people together. Thriving Southland also invests in useful and targeted data-led science, modelling and case studies to increase learning and knowledge across Southland's agricultural sector.

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

	2026	2025
Projects Projects have ranged from small ones, where the objectives were to support engagement and connecting, through to riparian mitigation and monitoring native bush recovery.	» 37 projects approved	» 25 projects approved
Community Wellbeing Enabling and supporting Catchment Group meetings and events that bring people together around a common goal, while providing opportunities to inform, connect and share knowledge.	» 131 catchment meetings and events » Total attendance of 1,417	» 166 catchment meetings and events » Total attendance of 2,170
Education and Learning Providing science reports, information, tools and workshops to Catchment Groups to enable informed decisions.	» Workshops x 13 » Field days x 15 » Catchment Group Leader Forum x 1 » Everything to Gain Event – What Really Matters: Paddocks to Markets – with a series of expert presentations and discussions » Webinar on Making Sense of the Rules: Farming, Cultivation, Winter Grazing and Wetlands.	» 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
Communication Different channels set up to effectively communicate with catchment members, communities and stakeholders.	» 458,700 Facebook reach » 1,604 monthly newsletter recipients with an open rate of 29% » 1.4k website page views	» 105,600 Facebook reach » 1,561 monthly newsletter recipients with an open rate of 33% » 3.5k website page views

Financials

Full Financial Statements

The full audited Financial Statements for the year ending 30 June 2026 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 6 Nov 2026.

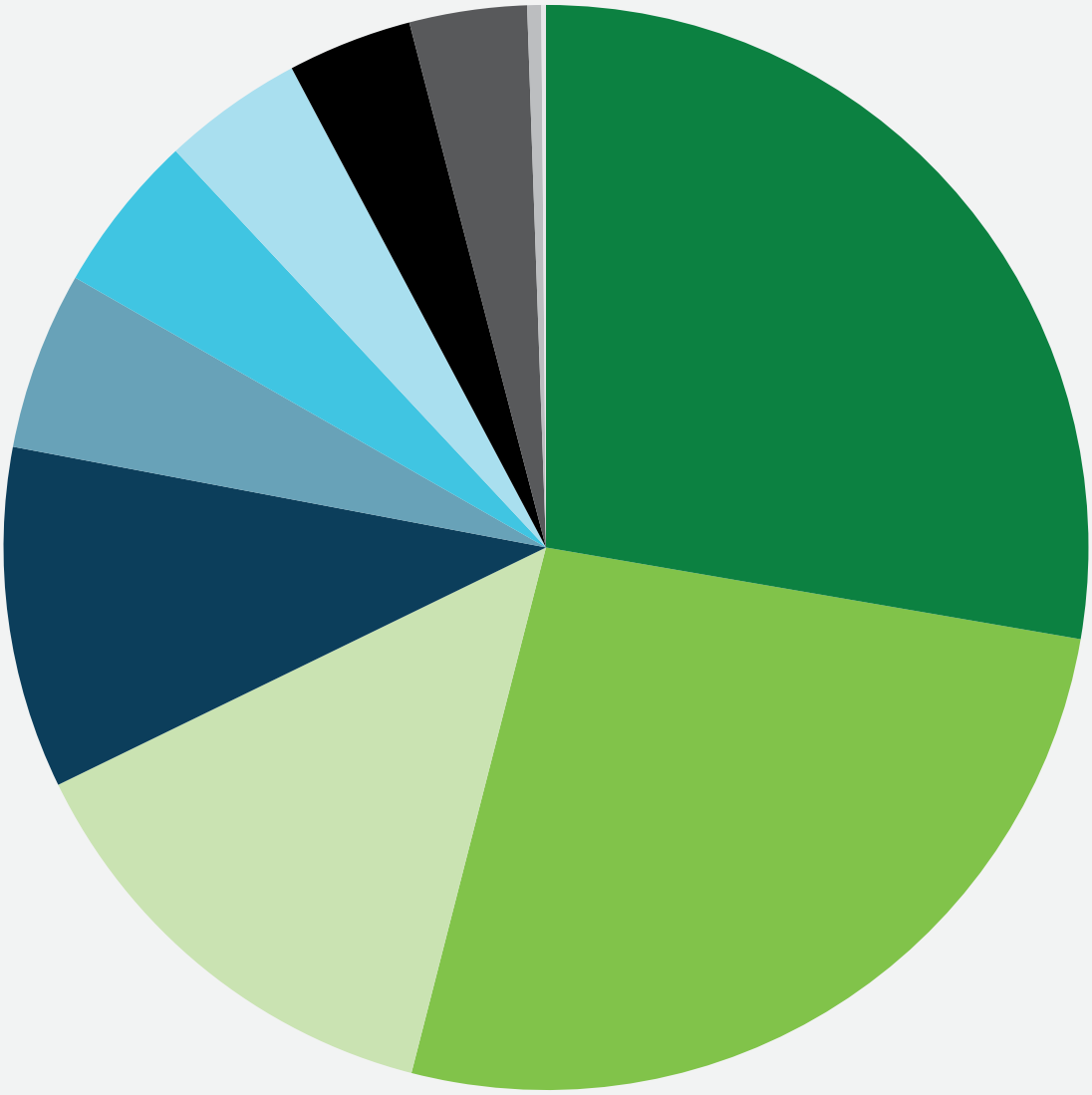
This summarised financial report has not been audited and may not contain sufficient information for a full understanding of the financial position of Thriving Southland, but copies of the full Financial Statements and the auditors report can be obtained from the Thriving Southland Office or from the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

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE	2026	2025
Income		
Donations Received	-	4,086
Ministry for Primary Industries Grant	1,200,000	1,200,000
Wai Connection	224,594	78,333
ES Wetland Funding	59,065	197,750
MBIE Contract Income (Just Transitions)	-	12,247
Sponsorhip	-	6,000
Project Mangement Fees	5,650	60,015
Interest	7,192	538
Other Income	-	-
Total Income	**1,496,501**	**1,558,970**
Expenses		
Catchment Projects – MPI Funding	194,435	131,885
Just Transitions Project		12,247
Wai Connections	67,079	194,092
ES Wetlands	59,065	1,684
Catchment Management	370,238	330,325
Applied Science	49,320	42,708
Communications	74,766	82,139
Stakeholder Engagement	1,965	5,425
Governance	52,235	57,581
Staff and Management	390,240	375,824
Planning and Project Management	5,848	27,565
Administration	143,379	162,773
Total Expenses	**1,408,569**	**1,424,247**
Net Surplus (Deficit)	**87,932**	**134,723**

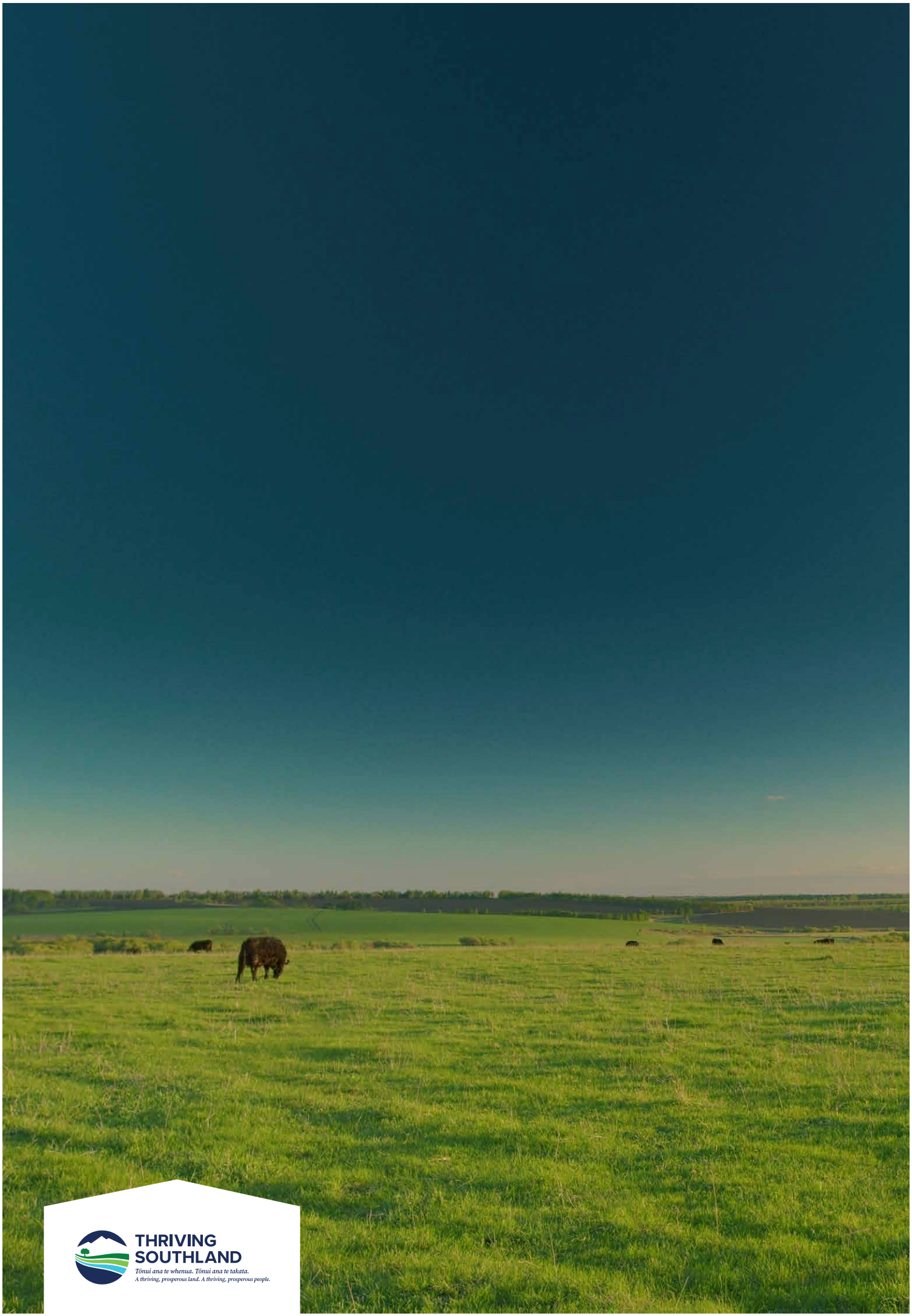
FINANCIAL POSITION		
Current Assets	1,061,398	1,173,298
Current Liabilities	724,935	924,766
Net Assets	**336,464**	**248,532**

Financials

2026 Expenses



- Staff and Management 28%
- Catchment Management 26%
- Catchment Projects - MPI Funding 14%
- Administration 10%
- Communications 5%
- Wai Connections 5%
- ES Wetlands 4%
- Governance 4%
- Applied Science 4%
- Planning and Project Management 0%
- Stakeholder Engagement 0%
- Just Transitions Project 0%



THRIVING SOUTHLAND

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