

Our research: listening to New Zealanders all around the country #talknature

A research team commissioned by Greenpeace Aotearoa set out across Aotearoa New Zealand to dig into how people understand ‘nature’.

They talked to people across the motu, from all walks of life, and what they heard again and again was most people are really worried about the state of nature but they feel alone in their concerns, so they keep quiet. Many were questioning where leadership to meet the scale of the problem would come from.

The researchers were surprised. They weren't asking people about their environmental worries, or what they wanted to see leaders do about them. But from region to region, group to group, the same theme was identified.

The early insight has come from a broader research programme, undertaken by Greenpeace Aotearoa to investigate how people living in Aotearoa New Zealand conceptualise and understand nature and being connected to nature. The study has used a qualitative approach, involving a series of focus groups conducted across the motu.

The study, which is on-going, is not investigating environmental concerns or solutions, which is why this theme coming through the data so strongly and consistently in the early analysis has been a surprise to the research team.

The Researchers

The research is being conducted by highly qualified, professional researchers, as part of a project that sits outside the standard campaigning and fundraising activities of Greenpeace Aotearoa. This work was conducted with the same standards of integrity and robustness used in academic settings.



Dr. Ranmalie Jayasinha is a public health practitioner and qualitative researcher with over ten years of experience working in academic and NGO settings. They have coordinated qualitative and mixed-methods research and knowledge translation projects in the fields of mental health and community development in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Canada. They are the Qualitative Researcher leading the national focus group study for the broader research programme.



Dr. Abby You is a qualitative researcher and educator with over six years experience working in the field of education. She has undertaken research and teaching in academic and school-based settings in China and Aotearoa New Zealand. She is the Research Assistant for the national focus group study for the broader research programme.



Dr. Jess Aitken is a quantitative research psychologist experienced in conducting large, longitudinal studies in both academic and NGO settings. Her research interests lie chiefly in the fields of social development and environmental attitudes and beliefs. She is the Research Manager on the broader project of which this focus group study was a part.

All researchers are fixed term employees of Greenpeace Aotearoa until December 2023.



Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit people across Aotearoa New Zealand into the study. The research team sought to include participants in the study on the basis of characteristics relevant to the research. This means we built our sample by recruiting people from different segments of the population we were interested in understanding the views and experiences of.



The sample were 89 people aged between 18 - 75 years and over, living in 14 urban and rural locations across the motu: Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, Hamilton, Hokitika, Invercargill, Kerikeri, Nelson, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Timaru, Wellington, Whanganui, Whāngarei.

They include people from different socio-cultural backgrounds including gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status and a range of current and former occupations, including government, business owners and employees, home-makers, teachers, police, farmers, commercial fishers and more.

Recruitment

People were recruited into the study in two ways; by Greenpeace directly and via an independent recruitment agency. We worked with the external recruiters to ensure the sample included voices that had lower levels of engagement with environmental issues, as well as those with higher environmental concern, which were determined in pre-screening.



Tangata Whenua participants and perspectives

The broader research programme that this early insight was drawn from, looked at population level conceptualisations and understandings of nature. In an Aotearoa New Zealand context the perspectives of Māori are of particular importance to building this understanding. In the broader programme of work this was a key consideration that resulted in a co-designed focus group study with tangata whenua participants to explore Te Ao Māori knowledge and practices related to nature and connection. This study was developed in collaboration with and conducted by a Māori Research Advisor in parallel to the Greenpeace Aotearoa focus groups.

In the Greenpeace Aotearoa focus groups, tangata whenua perspectives were approximately 15% of the sample, and they differed noticeably from the other participants. Where the rest of our participants were concerned, but hesitant to speak up, what was heard from Māori participants was concern, but already a willingness to speak and act.

It was important to honour this in the messaging in the film, which is why there is not a self-censoring tangata whenua character. Instead our cafe owner, Tui, represented the tangata whenua participants the research team spoke with.

Ethics and confidentiality

The study was conducted by professional researchers who held this work to the same standards of integrity and robustness used in academic settings.

Participants gave informed consent prior to participating. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary. The researchers followed ethical procedures to ensure participant confidentiality, privacy and safety throughout data collection, data storage, analysis and research results dissemination. Study findings will always be reported in a way that no individual participant can be identified.

What can qualitative research tell us?

Qualitative research aims to understand people's perceptions, opinions, and beliefs, as well as gather rich insights into what is causing people to think and feel in certain ways. Focus groups are a well established qualitative method for understanding shared attitudes, feelings, beliefs and experiences.

Although qualitative data is not statistically representative of a population, qualitative researchers have guidelines to make sure they are capturing reliable data that can offer valuable insights. For example, we built our sample by recruiting people from different segments of the population based on specific criteria relevant to the topic.

Data gathered from this sample allowed us to see consistent themes and patterns across groups, consensus across and within groups, and assess if there are any outliers or themes exclusive to one group that may not be reflective of a unique segment as a whole.

In this study we were able to establish data saturation. This means that when gathering the data we identified the same themes coming up, repeatedly across groups, reliably indicating that this is an established pattern and shared idea that we would see if we continued to conduct focus groups with similar people.

How the data was collected


The researchers ran a series of 16 focus groups across urban and regional areas across the motu. The focus groups involved a semi-structured question schedule about how participants interpreted and understood nature and a sense of connection to nature.

Each focus group session was 1.5 to 2 hours, held in-person or over Zoom video calling, included between 4 - 8 people, and was audio recorded, in accordance with participants' informed consent. During the session, researchers also observed the sessions and took notes capturing key points, significant quotes and any notable interactions.

Participants were given a small incentive in recognition of their time and contribution.

Focus group data was transcribed and de-identified prior to thematic analysis. Analysis involves identifying patterns – or themes – within the qualitative dataset through a process of systematic and iterative coding. The dataset was coded by multiple researchers to ensure reliability.

Final analysis and findings from the broader research programme are on-going.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey patterned sweater and a backpack, stands in a dimly lit cafe. She has a thoughtful expression, with her hand near her chin. Other people are blurred in the background.

Bringing the research insight to life on film

A powerful insight is only powerful if you can share it. So we were compelled to find a way to bring it all to life, in a way that everyone could relate to and be empowered by.

More of us are worried about nature than we realise.

The film aims to bring this feeling to life. By visualising the three typical New Zealanders feeling ‘shut down’, then revealing that this hesitancy is actually inside their own heads, and we are all feeling it. We aim to inspire self-reflection about those moments and encourage people to speak up.



Watch the film on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) and find out more at greenpeace.nz/talknature

 **Talk**Nature

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