



South Westland Jobs for Nature Outcomes Assessment

Evaluation Report
12 April 2023



About Allen + Clarke

Allen and Clarke Regulatory and Policy Specialists Ltd (*Allen + Clarke*) is a consultancy that specialises in research and evaluation; policy; business change and optimisation; and governance, secretariat and programme support services. Founded in 2001, the company is led by two Managing Partners, Matthew Allen and Paul Houlston, who share ownership with twelve senior staff. We have approximately 100 other personnel including evaluation and research practitioners, policy professionals, organisational change experts, administrative support and an in-house designer. We have offices in Wellington, New Zealand and Melbourne, Australia.

Allen + Clarke has experience undertaking evaluations and reviews in a range of sectors, including in wellbeing, health and education. Our company also works extensively for a range of government and non-government agencies in New Zealand, Australia, as well as international organisations in the Pacific, and Asia.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) commissioned *Allen + Clarke* to undertake an outcomes assessment of the social, human and economic impacts of the South Westland Jobs for Nature (J4N) project, focusing on the arrangements for workforce sharing between the tourism and conservation workforces.

The Department of Conservation (DOC) allocation of J4N funding focused on providing employment opportunities to help revitalise communities through nature-based employment. In South Westland, the programme has a specific focus on sustaining regional communities and businesses through providing training and employment opportunities for businesses and their employees across a range of conservation and recreation areas.

The outcomes assessment focused on understanding five key areas:

- the effectiveness of the joint workforce model
- outcomes for communities,
- outcomes for participants
- the potential for the programme to be extended
- learning and improvements identified for if the programme was rolled out in the future.

Allen + Clarke has analysed data collected from key documents and surveys, interviews with key stakeholders and interviews and focus groups with tourism business operators and employees in South Westland.

Findings from the outcomes assessment indicate that the model was successful in supporting workforce and job security and retaining skilled workers in the area, as well as ensuring that individuals were matched appropriately to nature-based roles. Components of the model that led to its success included having a locally based community connector and building flexibility into the model. Some challenges were identified, including delays in sign off for competencies for some participants, the administrative burden on some employers and misunderstandings about entitlements for employees.

The outcomes assessment identified substantial benefits for the South Westland region and individuals through the J4N project. These span across economic, social, mental and physical wellbeing domains. The J4N project promoted social cohesion, allowed businesses in the region to remain economically viable, and improved the tourism offering of the region. Individuals also benefitted physically, mentally and economically by being involved in the J4N project during the COVID-19 period.

Generally, there is a strong desire in the business community to see the programme continue into the future. However, findings suggest that buy-in from employees without long term connection to the region may be limited. Findings indicate that the job-sharing model has had a positive impact on the communities in the region and could provide solutions to issues such as seasonality in the region. However, there are differing views between varying stakeholders regarding the funding model expected to be used if the programme was continued in the region. Due to the unique nature of the region, workforce and business context, a hybrid funding model seems the most likely to be successful in being sustainable and attracting buy-in from business, government and other stakeholders.



1.0 CONTEXT

1.1 The South Westland J4N project

Jobs for Nature (J4N) is a \$1.219 billion programme that manages funding across multiple government agencies to benefit the environment, people and the regions. It is part of the COVID-19 recovery package. The objectives of the Government's J4N programme are to:

- create employment opportunities for people, at pace and with regional spread.
- realise benefits for freshwater ecosystems and water quality, biodiversity, climate change and cultural values.
- support sustainable land use and the implementation of new regulatory requirements, including for freshwater, biodiversity and climate change.

The agencies administering the funding are Ministry for the Environment, Department of Conservation, Ministry for Primary Industries, Land Information New Zealand and Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment. The vision of the Department of Conservation J4N programme was to *'provide just over \$488 million for Vote Conservation initiatives providing job opportunities for approximately 4,800 people to help revitalise communities through nature-based employment'*.

In July 2020, \$2.5 million of J4N funding was provided to the South Westland region for the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support Project. This was a regional alliance of businesses and government agencies to provide nature-based work opportunities to help retain skilled staff in the region. An additional \$1.28 million was provided in September 2021 to ensure the work continued. The funding is due to end in June 2023.

The South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support Project involved partnering with businesses to allow them to retain their workforce by temporarily redirecting workers into nature-based projects. Employees had the opportunity to engage in track maintenance and upgrades, threatened species work including surveying, field monitoring, transmitter replacement and threatened species analysis work such as acoustic analysis, camera trap monitoring, and species identification. Workers remained employees of the business, and DOC provided opportunities to undertake conservation work through an independent contract agreement with the business. An additional initiative within the project was the Mahaki ki Taiao kaupapa, which was supported by the local DOC Operations Manager and Te Runanga o Makaawhio. This initiative supported three whānau members to work with many taonga species and expand their role as kaitiaki in the region.

Flexibility was built into the programme to allow staff to work in both their permanent workplaces and undertake conservation tasks for the programme, allowing businesses to continue to trade and providing staff with secure employment.

The project aimed to ensure that highly skilled workers such as skydive instructors and glacier guides were retained in the region and that key tourism businesses were able to continue to trade. DOC provided training, PPE, health and safety and technical support to workers. With the return of some international visitors, workers are now able to increase their hours at their place of employment while still supplementing their hours with nature-based work when necessary.



1.2 The Tourism Industry Transformation Plan (ITP)

The Tourism Industry Transformation Plan (ITP) has been developed to transform tourism in Aotearoa New Zealand to a more regenerative model that leaves people, communities, and the environment better than before. The initial phase of the ITP has begun by ensuring that the wellbeing of people is centred in any future changes, with a focus on the Better Work Action Plan (BWAP). As part of the BWAP, one of the Tirohanga Hou (a new outlook, a new way of thinking and doing things) calls on the sector to 'embrace the flux and enable the flex'.

The J4N programme's South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support Project is provided as a case study within the BWAP as a model that could enable the industry to embrace peaks and troughs.

This outcomes assessment is intended to support the work of the Tourism ITP Better Work Leadership Group by providing more detail on the effectiveness of the workforce sharing model, and the movement of South Westland's tourism industry towards a more regenerative model.



2.0 THE OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to complete an outcomes assessment of the social, human and economic impacts of the South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support Project, focusing on the arrangements for workforce sharing between the tourism and conservation workforces.

2.2 Key questions

The key questions that have framed the outcomes assessment are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and key questions to frame the outcomes assessment

Theme	Key questions
1. Effectiveness ¹ of the joint workforce model	<p>1.1 How effective is the joint workforce model?</p> <p>1.2 What are the enablers and barriers encountered from the perspective of employers and employees?</p>
2. Outcomes for communities	<p>2.1 To what extent, and in what ways, has the South Westland J4N project delivered social, human, and economic value to the community(ies)?</p> <p>2.2 What (if any) medium and long-term gains has the South Westland region experience?</p>
3. Outcomes for participants	<p>3.1 What physical, mental, economic and wellbeing benefits have participants the projects experienced?</p>
4. Potential to extend the J4N South Westland project	<p>4.1 To what extent is there potential to adopt an enduring approach to the South Westland J4N project? If so, would the outcomes and benefits differ and, if so, how?</p> <p>4.2 Would a self-funding and/or non-government funded model be viable?</p>
5. Learning and improvement	<p>5.1 Are there areas in which the South Westland J4N project could be improved, if it was to continue past the end of the funding period in 2023?²</p>

¹ 'Effectiveness' is defined as an assessment of the degree of success of the programme in achieving its goals. This will include assessment of the holistic benefits and costs of the programme for individuals and the community.

² Key question 5 is a descriptive question that has been addressed through a synthesis of findings of questions 1-4. This is presented in the conclusions and recommendations section of this report.



2.3 Data collection methods

A summary of the data collection methods used in the evaluation is provided below, with further details about each method provided in Appendix 1. Data was collected between November 2022 and January 2023.

- **A review of programme and project documents**, including workshop notes, slide decks for presentations on the South Westland J4N project, project update documents, bi-monthly newsletters about the programme, and contracting materials.
- **Key informant interviews** with representatives from MBIE, the Department of Conservation (DOC), and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD).
- **A site visit to South Westland**. This involved interviews and focus groups with business operators (n=11), employees (n=20), local authorities (n=3), community stakeholder organisations (n=2), government organisations (n=2), iwi and hapū (n=1).
- **Analysis of secondary data**, including a survey of businesses on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, J4N South Westland administrative data, and contextual data such as tourism contribution to the South Westland economy.

2.4 Analysis of interview and focus group data

Qualitative data were sorted and analysed by participant group, including their role or interest in the J4N programme (e.g., business operator, employee, community stakeholder); and by the organisation or sector they represent (e.g., tourism, conservation, iwi/hapū). These data were analysed against the key questions to identify emerging themes and sub-themes.

The evaluation team then reviewed the viability of each emerging theme, with greater weighting placed on themes that were raised or agreed with by a majority of participants (75 percent or more) in the full participant cohort and/or specific participant groups. Where a theme was raised by a minority of those interviewed, this has been stated in the report.

2.5 Document analysis

The evaluation team reviewed the documents against an iteratively developed coding frame, based on the outcomes assessment themes and questions. The coding frame aligned with that used for the analysis of interview data, enabling us to cross-reference and integrate and synthesise information from both the documents and the interviews to inform the development of findings.

2.6 Analysis of quantitative data

Secondary data sources were arranged under the key questions and have been presented within the narrative as descriptive statistics. The quantitative data has primarily been used to triangulate and verify the qualitative data and the document analysis.



2.7 Emerging findings workshop

As part of the analysis process, the emerging themes and draft recommendations were presented to the MBIE Tourism Policy staff and DOC personnel at a workshop. The evaluation team sought feedback to ‘sense check’ the drafting findings and recommendations. Feedback from the workshop has informed this report.

2.8 Evaluative judgements

The evaluation team worked with the MBIE team to develop standards of performance, and measures of success (i.e., what good ‘looks like’) for under each theme.

The data gathered through the evaluation fieldwork was assessed against the criteria, desired achievements and standards of performance. For each criterion, the data have been assessed against a rubric developed by the evaluation team (Table 2) to identify where each aspect of the J4N project is sitting in terms of its impact. These overall ratings form the basis of evaluative judgements on key aspects of the South Westland J4N programme, provided in section **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 2: Rubric for the outcomes assessment

Insignificant impact	Minor impact	Moderate impact	High impact	Very high impact
The J4N South Westland project had very little to no impact on its objectives, individuals or communities regarding this theme.	Some impact on its objectives, individuals or communities regarding this theme.	Mainly positive impacts on its objectives, individuals or communities regarding this theme.	Evidence of strong positive impacts on its objectives, individuals or communities regarding this theme.	Almost completely positive impacts on its objectives, individuals or communities regarding this theme.

2.9 Methodological strengths and limitations

Our approach to the South Westland J4N outcomes assessment offers several strengths:

- We used mixed methods to seek evidence from a variety of sources. The primary data source was qualitative information from stakeholders in various roles within the South Westland J4N programme. The interviews provided rich data which enabled the evaluation to consider feedback on the J4N project through a range of lenses. This was complemented by a document review and triangulation with secondary quantitative data. The mixed-method approach allowed data to be triangulated to provide for robust findings based on multiple data sources.
- We focused on ‘explanation building’ to allow for investigation of not only ‘the what’, but also ‘the how’ and ‘the why’. The semi-structured style of interviewing enabled the



evaluation team to respond fluidly as interviews progressed to build explanations for the findings.

- A te ao Māori lens has been applied to all aspects of the evaluation through the inclusion of a culturally skilled Māori researcher in our team.


The methodology also has some limitations:

- The purposive (non-random) sampling approach means that the interview findings are not generalisable to the entire range of organisations and individuals involved in the J4N project. The individuals and groups selected for the interviews and focus groups represent a range of characteristics (e.g., business and employee participants in the projects, national stakeholders involved with J4N design and delivery). This strengthens the relevance of the findings, but nonetheless those engaged are only a small portion of those who were involved in the J4N project.
- Those involved with the design, management, governance and delivery of the J4N project, as captured by the qualitative interviews, are likely to have an interest in its continuation. Whilst their perspective is valuable, and critical for the evaluation, it is not neutral. An unbiased perspective is difficult to capture from the stakeholder engagement almost by definition.
- The availability of quantitative outcome data was lower than anticipated. For example, we were not able to access data on uptake of the job seeker benefit in the South Westland region, due to privacy concerns from the data custodian. This has limited our ability to make firm judgements on some aspects related to the economic outcomes of the J4N programme. However, we have drawn on publicly available economic data and project output and administrative data, which has informed the findings.

3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Effectiveness of the joint workforce model

KEQ 1.1: How effective is the joint workforce model?



The evaluation finds that the joint workforce model was effective in supporting tourism business viability and retaining the core tourism workforce retention during the drop in tourism caused by border closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The model was effective in supporting workforce and job security and retaining skilled workers in the area.

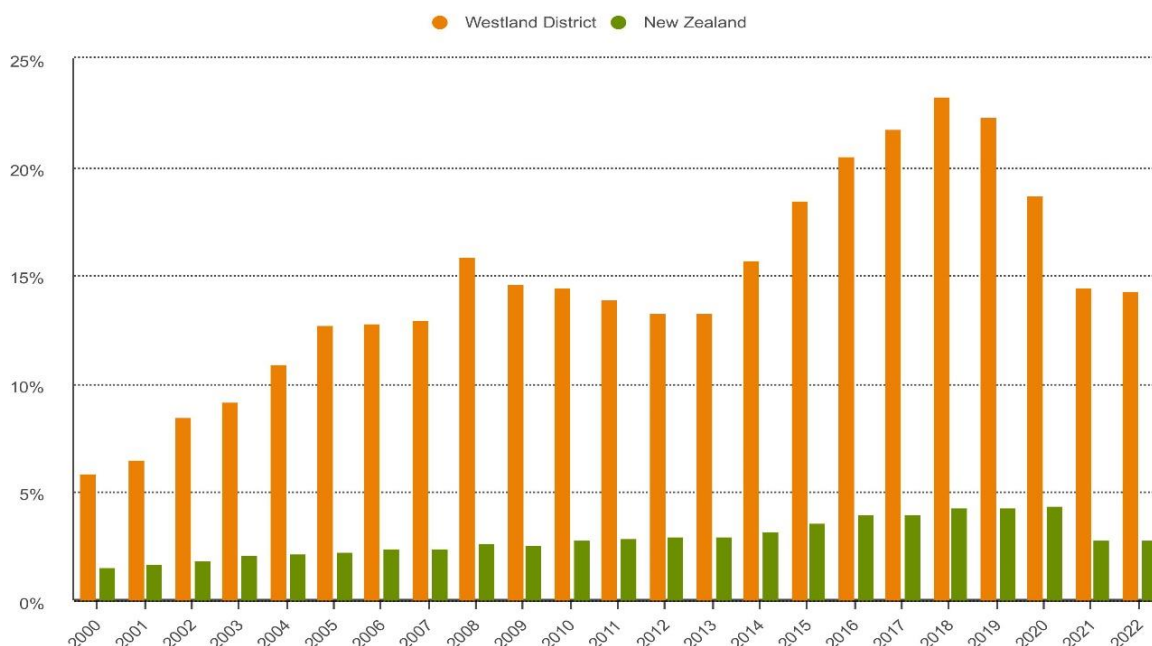
The document review and key informant interviews identified that key objectives of the South Westland J4N project were supporting the workforce and job security, and retaining skilled workers within the area. The evidence shows that the model was effective in achieving these objectives.

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed New Zealand's borders in March 2020 the South Westland region was particularly hard hit, as its economy relied heavily on international tourism. As displayed in Figure 1, the contribution of tourism to total GDP in the Westland District had been steadily rising, contributing 22.3 percent of the region's GDP in 2019. This reduced substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, falling to around 14.3 percent in 2021 and 14.5 percent in 2022.³

³ <https://ecoprofile.infometrics.co.nz/Westland%20District/Tourism/TourismGdp>



Figure 1: Tourism share of GDP 2000-2022, New Zealand and Westland District



The substantial decline in tourism meant business operators in the region lost much of their income and were forced to reduce their staffing. The Wage Subsidy Scheme offered a temporary reprieve during the lockdown period, with 90 percent of businesses in the South Westland region having received the Wage Subsidy as of November 2021⁴.

Businesses confirmed that the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme had allowed them to retain staff over the lockdown period. However, when this support stopped, many staff had to be let go. For example, a business operator that was interviewed for this evaluation reported having a quarter of their pre-COVID-19 workforce after the wage subsidy ended.

Pre-COVID we started with around 40 staff, but most of them left after the wage subsidy stopped. We came out of lockdown and we wanted to hold on to our core crew of about 12 staff. But we didn't have the work to keep them, and without additional support we would have had to let them go. (Business operator)

A pattern of rising unemployment is shown in the MBIE Regional Skills Leadership Group (RSLG) Local Insights report⁵ which states that at September 2020, the estimated unemployment rate was 3.3%, up from 2.7% in September 2019. The number of unemployed people in the region was estimated to have increased by approximately 100 people to an estimated 300 people, a large increase for an area with a small population base. Further, a

⁴ Development West Coast, October 2021. Glacier Country COVID Impact Survey. https://d25wwpnzqwq2f9h.cloudfront.net/media/documents/October_Glacier_Country_COVID_Impact_Survey.pdf

⁵ Regional Skills Leadership Group, December 2020. West Coast Local Insights Report. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/12662-local-insights-report-west-coast-interim-rslg-december-2020>



Development West Coast (DWC) survey reported that as of November 2021, 77 percent of businesses that responded to the survey reported that they had reduced staff, with a total of 216 jobs lost⁶.

These trends were reflected in the qualitative data collected for this evaluation. The majority of tourism business operators that were interviewed stated that the COVID-19 period had a negative impact on their business. This included losing skilled employees, experiencing a large reduction in sales and income and, for some, having to close their businesses.

95% of our customers were international. COVID wiped us. We had 10% of the sales figures of the year before. It was totally crippling. The [J4N] programme saved the business. We were very close to closing down without the programme. (Business operator)

The DWC survey results found that 152 people had left the community due to a lack of employment⁷. Workers told a similar story:

I would have left. Would have gone and done something else. I've been here for years, but I needed a job so would have moved. (Employee)

In June 2020, the J4N project was launched in South Westland. Evidence from businesses, employees and other community stakeholders indicates that the project was effective in supporting businesses to retain their skilled workers. As of October 2022, 187 people had been involved in the South Westland J4N project at some point, with a total of 54 business partners registered with the project during the first two years. In year one, an average of 59 people were employed by the project in the region. In year two, this increased to 72 people. Across the two years, participants worked on average 45.5 hours per month⁸.

This had substantial benefits for businesses, as it allowed them to retain their core staff, many of whom they had invested years of training and whom had valuable institutional knowledge.

It was a godsend. I've spent countless hours and money training my core team, and because of [J4N] I could offer fulltime work and keep them. (Business operator)

We are staying as we have family and a home here, but people without commitments or families it is easier for them to decide to go if the choices dry up. The programme helped keep these staff in the community. (Employee)

Both businesses and employees attributed their retention specifically to the South Westland J4N project, and were unambiguous that the absence of the project would have resulted in a loss of skilled workers.

⁶ Development West Coast, October 2021. Glacier Country COVID Impact Survey. https://d25wwpnzqwq2f9h.cloudfront.net/media/documents/October_Glacier_Country_COVID_Impact_Survey.pdf

⁷ Ibid

⁸ South Westland J4N administrative data provided by DOC.



Some individuals gained valuable and transferable skills by participating in the project.

The South Westland Conservation and Tourism Support Project also included a focus on building new and/or transferrable skills within the workforce. There were mixed views on the extent to which this objective was achieved. Several interviewees, mainly at the national level, noted the potential of the J4N project to build a more adaptable workforce, and to broaden the capacity of the environmental workforce.

From a strategic perspective, the new skills that workers gain is a key strength for long term workforce and environmental goals. (Stakeholder organisation)

The project embedded a focus on training, including both ‘on the job’ and formal qualifications. Interviewees noted that previously it was difficult for the tourism workforce to access conservation training. However, many are now qualified and able to engage in a range of conservation-based activities, opening up a number of other work opportunities for tourism workers. As of late 2022, 92 people had completed formal training including First Aid, Outdoor First Aid, Growsafe, DOC competencies (scrub bar use, chainsaw operations, power carrier operations, advanced driver training), and Wheels Tracks Roller (WTR) Certification with 10 enrolled in Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (NMIT) conservation short courses⁹. The NMIT courses are delivered in partnership with DOC and were offered to J4N participants to expand their knowledge and understanding of conservation and biodiversity theory, management, and practice.

The experience of participants themselves was mixed. About half of the employees that we interviewed stated that they hadn’t learned new skills, or that the skills or qualifications they had gained were niche and they did not consider them to be transferrable or likely to be used beyond the project. Examples were people doing computer-based work that used their existing skills or undertaking tasks like analysing recordings to determine species presence – while this was valuable work, some people struggled to see the applicability or transferability of these skills.

Other employees expressed a strong view that the skills they have learned would be transferrable, either within their current role or potential future jobs.

I’ve developed skills in outdoor education, biodiversity. I could see myself continuing to work in this area. It’s good to know I could probably get a job with DOC in the future if I needed to. (Employee)

⁹ Department of Conservation, 2022. *The Glacier Country Jobs 4 Nature Story Presentation.*



KEQ 1.2: What are the enablers and barriers encountered from the perspective of employers and employees?

The evaluation finds that key enablers included appropriate alignment of work to individual skills and experience, flexibility of the model and having a project manager who was strongly connected to the community. Findings indicated challenges were linked to mis-matched expectations related to timelines and project logistics.

Enablers

Participants were offered and appropriately matched to a variety of roles that aligned with their skills and experience.

The evidence showed that the project performed exceptionally well in offering a diversity of work and matching people effectively to the available roles. The project manager was a key driver of the matching process. This involved working with businesses and individuals to understand their needs and capability and match them with work that suited their experience and interests as best as possible.

Several employees and business owner-operators interviewed told us that they experienced trepidation when they first heard about the project, assuming that it would involve outdoor work like maintaining walking tracks, which would not suit their abilities. However, the evidence shows that there were a wide variety of jobs available, including computer or desk-based work, as well as more physical outdoor work. This variety was a key contributor to the project's success.

Related to this, there was positive feedback about the effectiveness of matching people to jobs that suited their skills. The majority of employees interviewed said that they found the work interesting, and that they received training to equip them for their role. A few reported minor issues at the start of the roll-out, such as not being offered tasks which matched their availability or skills.

I struggled to get work I could do at home, and received training but didn't get allocated any appropriate tasks. (Employee)

However, these issues were resolved as the system improved. Only a small portion of people reported that the work didn't suit them or wasn't of interest.

In addition, people could turn jobs down that were not of interest or well matched. This made participants feel that they had agency and choice, which increased their buy in to the project.

I was offered a [J4N] job that I was able to turn down. I'm grateful for the ability to choose. (Employee)

A community connector ensured the success of the project.

Another key feature of the model was having strong project management that was tailored to the needs of the community. The evidence indicated that this was successful at both the



management level and the project delivery level. The project management and delivery were led by DOC personnel, and interviewees considered that much of the success of the South Westland project could be attributed to the individuals who held these roles. Terms used to describe the team included 'a driving force' and 'champion of the cause', who 'harnessed the opportunity'.

Having strong connections within the community was seen as vital for the project manager. From the employee and employer perspective, having a local person there to knock on doors and encourage businesses to sign up, provide information and ask questions, arrange training, and check in regularly increased buy in to the programme, demystified it, and allayed concerns. This was vital for programme success.

Flexibility was built into the joint workforce model which contributed to the success of the project.

A final key feature was building in flexibility to the model. The model allowed participants to work in their tourism jobs when there was work available and work in nature based roles when there wasn't.

This flexibility meant businesses had the confidence to sign up to project with the knowledge that they could have the staff in their business when there was work. This was key to the model's success.

*Sometimes we'd have a job in our main business, and we'd have to come back. That's where it was good, we could come and go as we like. That was the idea of it too. It was there to help you out when we needed the extra work.
(Business operator)*

Challenges and barriers

Delays in achieving the required sign off caused frustration for participants.

Some business operators noted that there was a gap in processes to achieve timely DOC sign off for specialist roles such as chainsaw operation. These were vital for nature-based roles that could contribute to environmental outcomes. Some participants said that gaining the required competency sign off was slow or cumbersome.

A regional stakeholder attributed this to the limited capacity of those able to examine and sign off participants as well as limited opportunity for participants to gain enough hours of experience through their work. This resulted in a bottle neck in that there were roles that needed filling, and people willing to do them, but the work could not be undertaken due to the lack of sign off.

Being able to get sign offs for competencies like chain sawing and back country work [was a challenge]. Procedures were hard to get or not timely. It hamstrung some businesses in being able to complete work. (Regional stakeholder)



Some employers found the administrative tasks burdensome.

Some business operators raised concerns about the administrative work associated with being part of the project. A few stated that the administrative work was overly bureaucratic and burdensome. Others found the work manageable. This seemed to shift depending on the size of the team employed by an operator.

Took a bit of figuring out. I'd underestimated the amount of admin it was going to take. (Business operator)

Business gets paid for admin, which was good. The paperwork was manageable as there was only two of us. Some of the businesses had team leaders reporting in as a double check. (Business operator)

A stakeholder noted that much of the administrative work was required to meet reporting requirements, specifically for government spending and health and safety. Employers were compensated for time spent completing this work with some stating that the payment was generous.

The admin fee was more than adequate, it was great. (Business operator)

There were misunderstandings about pay and entitlements.

Some participants expressed confusion about where the liability for payment of annual leave and public holiday costs sat. Several businesses raised a concern that they retained the liability for public holidays and annual leave, even if the staff member was primarily undertaking conservation work for DOC at the time.

We also heard examples of this impacting negatively on workers, for example one person told us that they didn't take their holiday pay as they felt it would be too much of the burden on their regular tourism employer.

I didn't take my holiday pay as it's hard on [business owner] who takes the liability. (Employee)

However, the contracting agreement that business participants signed states that employees were paid 8% holiday pay as part of their wages.¹⁰ Public holidays and sick leave are not covered in this pay, only annual leave. An employer noted this was an issue for them:

Public holidays were a nightmare. If they normally did DOC job on a Monday and it was a public holiday, liability was still with business. (Business operator)

Stakeholders explained that no conservation work led by DOC is undertaken on public holidays or throughout the holiday period as DOC staff are not generally expected to undertake work on public holidays or across the Christmas period. This mismatch in understandings suggests a communication or perception issue between DOC, staff, and employers about annual leave entitlements.

¹⁰ Department of Conservation, *Independent Contract Agreement for South Westland Jobs for Nature Programme of Work*



3.2 Outcomes for communities

KEQ 2.1: To what extent, and in what ways, has the South Westland J4N project delivered social, human, and economic value to the community?

The evaluation finds that the project supported social cohesion and connectedness in the region and ensured many businesses in the region remain economically viable. Findings indicate that the tourism offering of the region has benefited from the project but the region is in its early stages towards moving to a regenerative tourism model.

Social and human value

The nature of the work promoted connectedness between individuals and business.

Qualitative evidence indicates that individuals and businesses made connections during the programme and were encouraged to work more collaboratively. Individuals from different workplaces were placed together and worked towards shared goals when completing nature-based work. Much of the work undertaken was social in nature and required people from different sectors, businesses and backgrounds to work together.

Participants noted that they formed new personal and professional relationships, and trust was built between businesses that may previously have seen each other as competitors. These connections have resulted in more collaborative business practices; some business operators stated that they now share knowledge and refer clients to one another because they have a greater level of trust and see the value in working together.

As a community we banded together and shared information and ideas. Usually, we wouldn't talk about business stuff, but everyone opened up. (Business operator)

[There was a] really strong community focus and there is a sense that J4N brought the community together. There were competitors who were working together – sharing information and building trust, community spirit and collaborative spirit. (National stakeholder)

Individuals and businesses also stated that they had an increased understanding of the value that they can add to conservation and the community generally. Interviewees stated that they enjoyed positively contributing to the environment.

Collaboration within community to understand expertise, passion, value [has increased]. [The] community is much closer, due to having mutual respect and greater understanding of the role of other people. (Business operator)



The project supported greater social cohesion within communities and between sectors.

Interviewees suggested that community members who work within the tourism sector have shifted their perception of the Department of Conservation. National level stakeholders and those working in the tourism industry, reported that historically some individuals held negative perceptions of DOC. However, many South Westland locals noted that participants and the wider community had learnt about conservation work and gained an appreciation for the work that DOC does in the region. Many emphasised that the project broke down barriers and encouraged individuals to form relationships with each.

Living in South Westland, it was always ‘them vs us’ with DOC. They are not particularly liked by tourism industry and farmers. J4N came along and people were sceptical, but it brought DOC and the community closer together. There has always been friction (new vehicles, lots of money, unhelpful when told about problems with tracks etc). Friction started to dissipate. (Business operator)

This was also apparent in the other direction, with those working for DOC reporting to better understand the value of the tourism offering:

The programme helped the conservation sector see that the tourism industry adds [value] to the community, where previously tourism was not thought about positively (Local stakeholder organisation)

As well as this, an interviewee noted that stronger relationships were formed between DOC and hapū. It was reported that DOC project staff worked with the rūnanga to ensure the programmes were beneficial to its members and worked together to identify opportunities to undertake meaningful work.

An individual representing the rūnanga reported that mana whenua were able to remain in or return to the region and take on further responsibility as kaitiaki because of the opportunities that the programme provided. For example, an interviewee explained that DOC looks after a Māori-owned island in the region. Because of the J4N project, mana whenua rangers have been able to take over the work and lead it on behalf of the owners.

Economic Value

The project ensured that businesses remained open and economically viable.

The employment opportunities of the project provided spill over economic benefits to local businesses. Findings from the document review, quantitative data analysis and interviews indicated that the project provided people with income to spend at local businesses.

From July 2020 to January 2023 just over \$2,324,000 has been paid in wages to employees participating in the programme.¹¹ During qualitative interviews national and local stakeholders

¹¹ South Westland J4N administrative data provided by DOC.



stated that this provided an economic injection to add to the flow of income, and that this helped to keep local businesses afloat.

Further, it was reported that because many key services were able to continue operating, people were able to remain in the region. Key services that remained operational included childcare and schools, and emergency services. One interviewee considered that the project saved their town.

[Business] had lots of people working for J4N it meant they stayed in the town, and kept spending at local businesses. Another 15-20 people from that business would have left and killed off the town. (Business operator)

In addition, many tourism business operators confirmed that they were able to keep their businesses operational, and attributed this directly to the J4N project. This allowed businesses to keep their practices, policies and requirements up to date for when they resumed operations. In turn, this ensured that the region had an integrated range of tourism offerings available for visitors when they returned, including transport options, accommodation and attractions. The J4N project enabled businesses and communities to remain economically viable and operational.

Tourism offering has improved due to the introduction of the project.

Findings from the document review and interviews indicated that key tourism and conservation infrastructure such as walking tracks and huts were improved through work undertaken via the project. Administrative data on the J4N programme shows that in 2020-21 the monthly average hours worked in J4N was 2433 and in 2021-22 the monthly average hours was 3591¹². This represents a substantial investment in time undertaking tasks to support the conservation estate in South Westland.

Interviewees stressed that the region and tourism industry rely heavily on natural resources and that the National Park status of some of the region attracts visitors domestically and internationally. The environment is intrinsically linked to the economic sustainability and value of the tourism industry of the region. Generally, findings indicated that the conservation estate of the region has benefited from the work and in turn could contribute to a higher value tourism offering for South Westland.

South Westland is sitting on national parks. J4N work has improved infrastructure such as trails and huts, and there is a lot of interest in voluntourism and regenerative tourism offering. (National stakeholder)

Opportunities exist for tourism to give back to the environment, but the region is in the early stages of a shift to regenerative tourism.

Findings indicate mixed views about the extent of the region's progress towards the diversification of South Westland's tourism offering and their shift to a regenerative tourism model. Through the document review, it was found that the South Westland region and the tourism industry in particular will be one of the hardest hit by the impacts of climate change. It is predicted that increased extreme weather events are likely to occur, glaciers will continue

¹² South Westland J4N administrative data provided by DOC.



to retreat¹³ and tourism infrastructure will be impacted¹⁴. National level stakeholders suggested that by shifting to a more regenerative approach and upskilling tourism workers in conservation, the region would be better able to adapt by pivoting and reducing their reliance on tourism.

One interviewee noted that due to the J4N project, businesses and employees value nature much more now:

The employees went out and worked in nature – they brought it back into their lives but also back into their mahi and [the way] they talk to their guests. It's enriching their lives and enriching the experience for enriches the businesses and manuhiri. (Local stakeholder organisation)

Tourism business operators reflected that the project has shown them that tourism can give back to the community and the environment. One stakeholder considered that this had increased the social license of tourism in the region. Some operators reported that they felt more educated about the environment and a few reported that they were able to or were looking to offer experiences that contributed positively to the environment. One operator reported that voluntourism opportunities were popular with visitors to the region. Stakeholders suggested that voluntourism may be able to attract visitors to the region and increase regenerative activities.

On the other hand, the majority of business operators interviewed stated that, at present, little had changed about their tourism offering outside of them learning more about the region they live in. Many operators and employees expressed that they could share their learnings with visitors. There is limited evidence to suggest that the upskilling of workers is supporting the diversification of tourism offerings in the region. There seems to be limited shifts towards the integration of regenerative models in tourism offerings that can be attributed to the programme.

However, a stakeholder noted that the project has made conversations about regenerative tourism easier as people have been exposed to the idea and have actively contributed to it. National level stakeholders explained that opportunities for tourists to engage in voluntourism and regenerative tourism opportunities may increase and further diversify the regions tourism offering.

[I] learnt a lot more about nature, working in nature and the challenges. Interesting but wouldn't say I have made any changes in my regular employment. (Employee)

The workforce sharing model may support retention of seasonal workers in the region.

Another focus of this evaluation was to understand the impact of the programme on seasonality, specifically that of tourism demand and on workforce. Some suggested that by creating opportunities in nature-based work and shifting to a workforce sharing model, related workforce issues could be overcome.

Although there is some evidence that tourism offerings may have shifted to be more environmentally focused, there was little evidence to suggest that there was a shift in tourism

¹³ NIWA, 2022. *IPPC Climate Predictions*. <https://niwa.co.nz/climate-change>

¹⁴ Department of Conservation, 2022. *The Glacier Country Jobs 4 Nature Story Presentation*.



demand. However, we did hear that the project may be able to support worker retention during the low periods. Through the document review and interviews we heard that the peak season generally runs between October to April. Outside of this time, many workers leave the region. Employers explained that the cost of rehiring and retraining staff is high, therefore, retaining staff in low periods would be preferable.

As previously noted, the project's flexibility allows staff to undertake conservation work between their usual tourism work. This provides an opportunity for workers to undertake fulltime work in low and shoulder seasons.

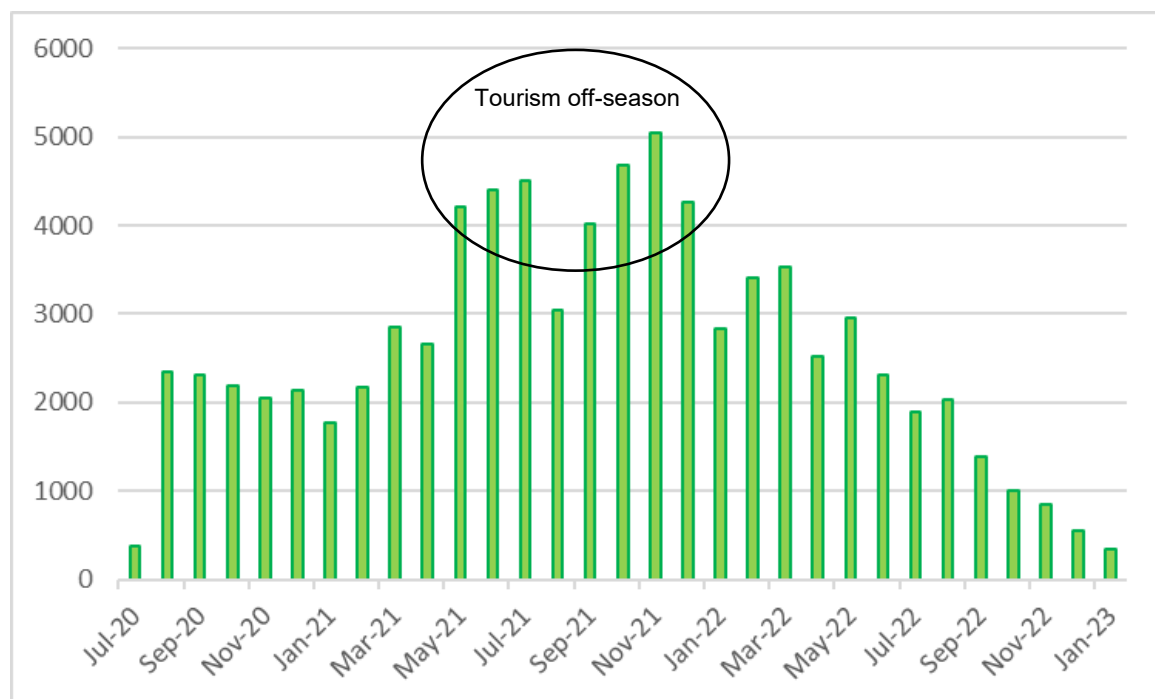
A few interviewees noted there is the potential for there to be a lack of conservation work in the winter months, as tasks such as track maintenance are most effectively undertaken in dry conditions. This mismatch could present a challenge to the programme. However, discussions with DOC personnel indicated that there is some flexibility to adjust work programmes to the availability of labour, and that many conservation tasks are desk-based and can be undertaken at any time of the year.

Data on total hours worked in J4N roles per month shows that, even in the context of closed international borders due to COVID-19, the seasonal nature of tourism appears to have impacted on demand for work, and that there was adequate supply of tasks to meet this demand.

As shown in Figure 2, the highest number of monthly hours worked were during the winter and spring months of May to November 2021¹⁵, which aligns with the tourism off season. The drop in participation in August 2021 could be associated with the country going into Level four lockdown. This meant that no outdoor work could be completed, and many people could only work in isolation. It is also noted that in 2022 monthly total hours were higher in February and March than in the winter months, which may be correlated with a drop in domestic tourism due to restrictions associated with the Omicron COVID-19 variant.

¹⁵ South Westland J4N administrative data provided by DOC.

Figure 2: Total hours worked in J4N roles per month



Further, stakeholders explained that outside of the COVID-19 border closure context, those who work in tourism may be less inclined to engage in nature-based work on a long-term basis due to a number of reasons. These included discrepancy in pay, the physicality and nature of the work.

As well as this, some stakeholders noted that many workers look to leave the region to seek other seasonal work or travel during low periods. One stated that tourism and hospitality workers are often mobile in nature and staying in one region does not suit their lifestyle. Despite this, some interviewees were confident that this challenge could be overcome through effective human resource and workflow management.

Overall, there were mixed perceptions about whether the programme model would be successful in managing the workforce across seasons.

Previously businesses had all worked with their heads down. J4N made them look up and work more collaboratively. How might we share labour and work a little differently. (Local stakeholder organisation)



3.3 Outcomes for participants

KEQ 3.1: What physical, mental, economic and wellbeing benefits have participants of the projects experienced?

The evaluation finds that participants experienced positive mental and physical benefits that can be attributed to the project including increased fitness, mood and confidence.

Economic Wellbeing

Findings indicate that there were real economic benefits for individuals involved in the project.

As was discussed under KEQ 1.1, many people left South Westland and businesses closed before the start of the J4N programme, and did not return or reopen despite the project's roll-out in the region. However, interviewees noted that for many employers and owner-operators, the project was a lifeline that enabled them to retain their workers and avoid permanent closure. Although many business operators were unable to continue operating at full capacity due to a lack of visitors, many were able to afford to put their businesses into hibernation or operate with skeleton staff rather than closing entirely.

*We had a huge loss of income when COVID hit... By the time we joined J4N, we had already let everyone go as all business had dried up. But J4N provided employment for me, and the money kept the business just-about-afloat.
(Business operator)*

This allowed operators to be ready to operate when visitors returned. Many noted that without the project, their businesses would have had to close permanently.

Findings also indicated that employees and owner-operators benefited from the ability to engage in the equivalent of fulltime work. Many employees reported that the project provided them with an additional source of income that would otherwise not have been available to them.

The J4N project provided work opportunities to supplement existing employment arrangements, to enable employees to work their contracted hours, up to a maximum of 40 hours per week in total. Most of the employees interviewed stated that without the additional income, themselves and their families would have financially struggled or would have had to leave the region to find additional employment opportunities.

As a family, it would have meant 20 hours per week less income without J4N. We would have really struggled. (Employee)

The money stopped, but bills don't. You've gotta spend your money no matter what. It was a worry where it was going to come from. (Business operator)



The programme offered at least the Living Wage to all participants for work completed specifically for the project.¹⁶ Higher pay rates were also offered for those undertaking leadership roles. A stakeholder noted that, for some, the pay rate was either lower or higher than their usual pay rate. This had a number of effects. For some, especially skilled workers, they were paid significantly less per hour. A stakeholder reported that some workplaces topped up their employees' wages however, this was not a widespread practice. Conversely, others were paid more per hour compared to their normal tourism work. Although the economic benefit at the time was clear, some employees noted that the pay disparities could influence their decision to participate in the future. This is discussed further under KEQ 4.1.

Physical Wellbeing

The physicality of some of the work increased participant fitness.

A few of the employees engaged with the project noted that there were physical benefits of being involved in nature-based work. The physical benefits included increased fitness and weight loss from being engaged in physical work rather than desk-based work. It was noted that the work was often quite physically demanding however, the work was matched to the ability of individuals. One participant noted that at first, the work was incredibly challenging however, as their physical fitness improved, they found it easier.

It was hard physical work, but the more you did it, the fitter you got. (Business operator)

About half of the employees that participated in the evaluation reported that they had not seen a change in their physical wellbeing, as they primarily undertook computer or desk-based tasks.

Mental Wellbeing

Jobs for Nature helped to relieve stress caused by the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings suggests that the economic, social and physical benefits of the project positively contributed to the mental wellbeing of participants, despite challenges of COVID-19. Participants initially told us about the stress, worry and isolation they felt due to the financial pressures of COVID-19, the isolation of the lockdowns and general uncertainty of the COVID-19 situation. The Development West Coast Survey indicated that 90 percent of respondents rated their mental health during the COVID-19 period as neutral to very negative.¹⁷

The majority of business operators and employees reported that the project provided them with a way to deal with the stress. Key to this was the ability for participants to keep busy and be engaged in work in order to take their mind off stresses at home. Participants explained that having consistent income relieved them of pressures such as being able to provide for their family or keeping their business afloat.

¹⁶ Department of Conservation, *Independent Contract Agreement for South Westland Jobs for Nature Programme of Work*

¹⁷ Development West Coast, October 2021. Glacier Country COVID Impact Survey. https://d25wwpnzwwq2f9h.cloudfront.net/media/documents/October_Glacier_Country_COVID_Impact_Survey.pdf



The conservation work gives you something to do and take your mind off the fact that there is no income coming in due to COVID. It provided mental benefits as well as financial help. (Business operator)

Participants of the project experienced increased confidence and mood.

It was also reported that participants felt a greater level of confidence and pride in themselves that they attributed to engaging in challenging and fulfilling work. A few also noted that they felt supported by the project teams and appreciated the opportunity to engage in the programme.

Working was a big step. Being self-employed, you lose that confidence about going back into the workforce. You get confidence that you can keep up with younger people. (Business operator)

Working in the outdoors and doing “good work” brought a sense of satisfaction and pride in their place and their contribution. (The Glacier Country Jobs 4 Nature Story presentation)

Others also stated that being in the outdoors and engaging with nature was beneficial for their mental health.

My spirit has been lifted from being outdoors. (Employee)

They have been able to do cool work. Working with different species. Great to see them get excited about their own backyard. (Local stakeholder organisation)

Community connections were beneficial for participants.

Outside of the work itself, participants explained that connecting with members of their community was beneficial for their wellbeing, especially after the isolation of lockdown periods. One interviewee stated that they felt incredibly low during lockdown and missed the social interaction they normally had with tourists. The project provided this person with an opportunity to meet new people and form friendships with others in the community. Another participant noted that they had met people who they’d never encountered in the community despite living there for many years. Individuals saw mental wellbeing benefits in the connections they made through the project and have made lasting friendships out of it.

Mana whenua have benefited from positive engagement with the project.

A number of interlinked cultural, social and economic benefits for mana whenua have been reported. An interviewee emphasised that the J4N programme was a vehicle to strengthen the two-way relationship between DOC and the rūnanga. They expressed that the project allowed DOC to learn from their existing knowledge and bring in mātauranga Māori perspectives into the work. Further, by participating in the programme, participants from the rūnanga were upskilled. A stakeholder emphasised that the project has given some mana whenua participants the experience, qualifications, and skills to step into their own businesses as contractors to DOC. They therefore have agency over the work they do while contributing meaningfully to the region.



The J4N project wellbeing outcomes broadly align with the Living Standards Framework individual and collective wellbeing domains.

The findings of the outcomes assessment have been framed against the Living Standards Framework (LSF). The LSF supports the framing of the assessment of the holistic benefits of the project, including the physical and mental wellbeing impacts. The assessment indicates that there have been a range of positive outcomes across the domains that contribute to community and individual wellbeing.

Table 3: Summary of South Westland J4N outcomes against LSF individual and collective wellbeing domains

Domain	Definition
Health	Participants from the project reported increased physical health and mental health benefits while taking part in the project through the active components of the work and connecting with others and their natural environment.
Knowledge and skills	Some participants gained new and transferable skills and knowledge through training and exposure to new types of work. Employees and employers are able to share new knowledge about the region and flora and fauna with visitors to the region.
Cultural capability and belonging	Some employees and employers learnt about indigenous flora and fauna. Mana whenua were able to expand their role of Kaitiaki in the region and support integration of Mātauranga Māori perspectives into some parts of the project. Finally, greater social cohesion was experienced as residents of the region worked together and connected over their shared experience.
Work, care and volunteering	Participants contributed directly to the conservation outcomes in and outside of the region. They completed this work while still employed by their usual tourism employer.
Engagement and voice	Findings do not indicate that the J4N project contributed to this outcome.
Income, consumption and wealth	The J4N project supported those in the tourism sector to stay in the region and continue to contribute to the region despite the shock of COVID-19. The J4N programme provided work up to 40 hours per week to support participants with reduced income.
Housing	Findings do not indicate that the J4N project contributed to this outcome.
Environmental amenity	Although this evaluation did not focus on the environmental outcomes, participants did note that key tourism and conservation infrastructure such as walking tracks and huts were improved through work undertaken via the programme. The model was focused on enabling people to undertake nature-based work in the conservation estate. Activities such as trapping, tracking and more were undertaken.



Leisure and play	Findings do not indicate that the J4N project contributed to this outcome.
Family and friends	Some participants noted that they felt supported by the project teams and felt more connected to others in the region because of the project.
Safety	Participants of the project undertook health and safety training and were provided with PPE to use to keep them safe while working and while operating in a COVID-19 environment. Business partners operated under either their own Safety Plan or a Safety Plan developed with DOC to keep the participants safe.
Subjective wellbeing	Participants expressed that they felt a greater level of confidence and pride in themselves that they attributed to engaging in challenging and fulfilling work. Participants reported positive mental wellbeing benefits while being part of the project.

3.4 Potential to extend the J4N South Westland project

KEQ 4.1: To what extent is there potential to adopt an enduring approach to the South Westland J4N project? If so, would the outcomes and benefits differ and, if so, how?



The evaluation finds that there is strong business interest in continuing the J4N project, but that participation from employees is likely to be on a reduced scale from the current programme.

There is strong interest from the business community to continue the J4N workforce sharing model.

The findings from interviews with business operators and other stakeholders in the South Westland community indicate that there is an appetite amongst the business community to continue the J4N model beyond its currently contracted timeframe. Approximately 75 percent of the business operators that were interviewed for this evaluation supported adopting an enduring approach to the project in South Westland. The project was seen by business operators as a means of addressing the challenges associated with the seasonality of the tourism sector, and a way to attract and keep employees in the region, reducing costs associated with attrition and retraining a transient workforce.

Why would you want to lose this? This is the type of economic system that is world changing. (Business operator)



We'd been keen for it to continue after COVID. It hasn't lost relevance. One of the arguments is that we are very seasonal here. J4N would help by keeping people in area and businesses would not have to retrain people every year. (Business operator)

Most of the 25 percent of business operators that did not support the extension of the model considered it would not be needed in a post-COVID environment, once borders are open. They stated that now the international tourism market is beginning to rebuild, they would return to their previous business model of using peak season financial returns to offset lower revenue during winter.

A small number of business operators also raised concerns that the extension of the model post-COVID may exacerbate competition for workers in the context of a tight employment market.

The tourism businesses are struggling for staff, and there is a risk that training up people for conservation roles might increase staff loss. Why would people choose to work in a restaurant where you had to work nights, when you could do a 9-5 conservation role? (Business operator)

About half of the employees interviewed would be interested in continuing to participate in J4N.

The proportion of employees that expressed interest in extending the model was lower. Approximately 50 percent of this cohort of interviewees stated that they would be interested in participating in the J4N project if it was extended beyond June 2023.

Employees that wanted to continue to participate in the shared workforce model were typically those that had established connections to the South Westland region, such as owning a home, having children in local schools, and/or being long term residents. For these employees, J4N is an attractive proposition as it offers an opportunity to bridge the low season employment gap and achieve a stable, year-round income.

[Extending the J4N model] would be brilliant. It's feast or famine here and we always struggle in winter. (Employee)

On the other hand, the remaining 50 percent of employees interviewed indicated that they would not participate in the project, should it be extended. These employees tended to enjoy the seasonal nature of the tourism sector, and pre-COVID border closures had often worked internationally between the northern and southern hemisphere peak seasons. For these employees, there was limited desire to remain in the South Westland region year-round and the prospect of continuing to work in nature-based roles did not appeal.

It was great to keep some money coming in when the borders were shut... but I'll be heading off to Canada after the summer and can't see myself doing any more DOC work. (Employee)

Other employees, particularly those in specialist roles such as skydiving instructors or helicopter pilots, indicated that the roles available through the J4N project had been valued in the COVID-19 border closure context but they did not see participation in conservation work as viable over the long term, mainly due to the lower salary offered.



The seasonal nature of tourism work indicates that the model could work beyond COVID-19, albeit on a smaller scale.

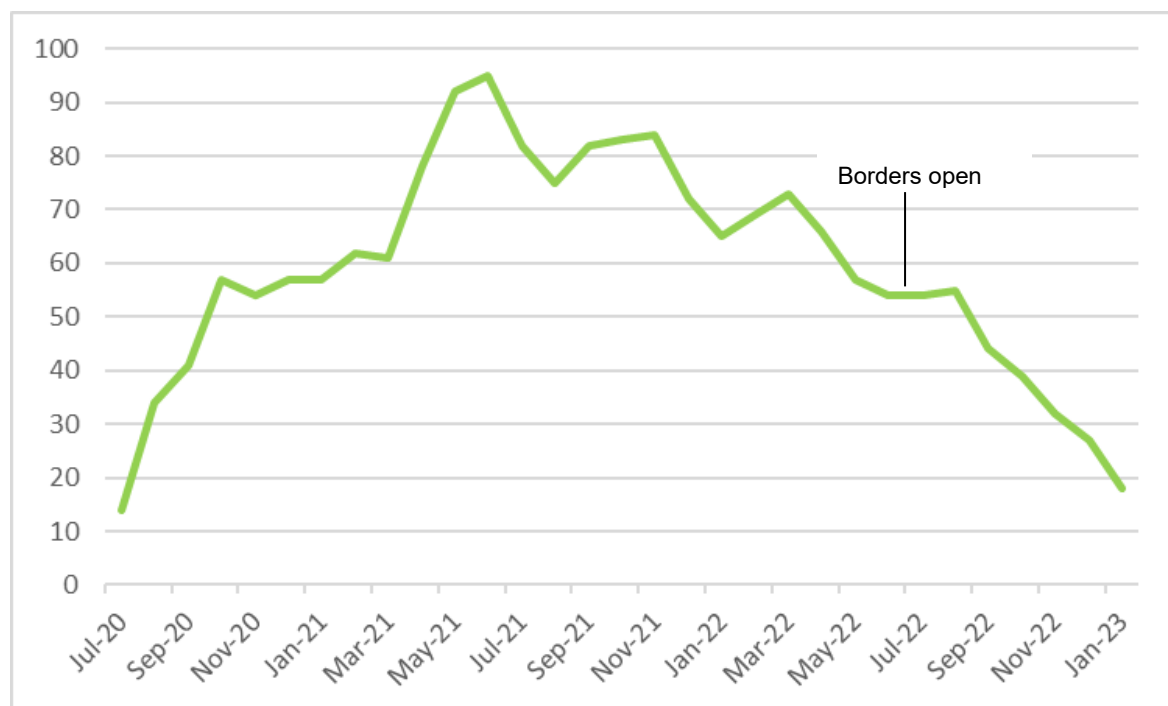
The evidence gathered through this evaluation suggests that the model has the potential to work effectively beyond the COVID-19 context. Interviews with national stakeholders, business operators and employees indicated that the ‘shock’ of the pandemic was necessary to facilitate the development of the workforce sharing model. It is unlikely that formalised workforce sharing would have happened otherwise, particularly in the context of reported distrust between the tourism and conservation sectors (see KEQ2.1 for further details).

While the context that prompted the development of the model (i.e., loss of international tourists due to pandemic-closed borders) may be less relevant, the seasonal nature of the tourism sector in South Westland means that the key driver for businesses and employees to participate (i.e., seasonal gaps in income) remains.

As was discussed above, the evaluation findings show that beyond the COVID-19 context, there is likely to be relatively high business operator (including owner-operators and medium-large enterprises) uptake of an extended J4N programme, but lower employee participation. However, evidence from business operators and employees indicates that the employees that are more likely to participate are those that business owners often want to retain; typically longer term employees with substantial experience and institutional knowledge. This suggests that an extended project is likely to see uptake from businesses and employees, but on a smaller scale than experienced during the current project.

While it is difficult to predict the extent of participation post-COVID, data on monthly individual participant numbers, as shown in Figure 3 the number of individual participants per month has decreased since the New Zealand border opened in July 2022. The drop off in numbers may indicate that businesses are able to provide consistent employment as international tourists return, it is coming into peak summer season, and/or that a portion of the tourism workforce has moved on to other locations.

Figure 3: Total number of South Westland J4N participants per month



Current policy settings offer an enabling policy context for continuing the J4N model in South Westland

In addition, the current policy settings, particularly the strategic direction outlined in *He Mahere Tiaki Kaimahi – Better Work Action Plan*¹⁸, are favourable to the ongoing success of the programme. The J4N workforce sharing model aligns with a Tirohanga Hou (new outlook, a new way of thinking and doing things) of the action plan; embracing the flux and enabling the flex of tourism demand. This creates an enabling policy environment, which may encourage key agencies (including DOC, MBIE and local government) to prioritise support and resources for the extension of the model beyond the COVID-19 context.

An extension of the programme is likely to provide medium and long-term economic benefits to individuals and the community

As at January 2023 the J4N project has been operating in South Westland for 2.5 years. During this time the model has been tested and refined, offering ‘proof of concept’ that has demonstrated economic and wellbeing benefits for individuals and the community. The findings of this evaluation indicate that many of the immediate outcomes are directly related to the impacts of COVID-19 border closures, and are unlikely to be replicated outside of this context. This includes immediate economic outcomes such as allowing businesses to remain open and viable, and wellbeing benefits such as reduced stress and isolation. These benefits are likely to be negligible outside of the COVID-19 context.

¹⁸ Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, March 2023. He Mahere Tiaki Kaimahi Better Work Action Plan. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism/tourism-projects/tourism-industry-transformation-plan/phase-1-better-work-he-mahere-tiaki-kaimahi/>



However, the evaluation findings indicate that the extension of the model would support medium and longer-term economic outcomes. Economic benefits related to a more stable, year-round income source are likely to be sustained at the individual, business and community level. The ongoing investment in a hybrid workforce would allow further time to build on the recently emerging shift to a regenerative tourism model, given the business participants and shared workforce would be largely comprised of people who have long term ties to the region and are invested in its future.

In addition, the evidence suggests that outcomes related to community cohesion would be retained if the programme was extended. The continuation of the programme would allow the initial connections between key entities such as DOC, iwi and hapū, and tourism businesses to strengthen. Interviewees from these organisations reported a strong desire for the goodwill and collaboration forged through the J4N programme model to continue.

We know there is an opportunity to work better with iwi, hapū and whānau. We've started to forge connections and want to keep this momentum... [continuing the programme] would be a leap to get to big impact scale. (Local stakeholder organisation).

The unique features of South Westland may limit the replicability of the model in other regions

The evaluation also considered the extent to which the model could be rolled out to other regions. While it is very difficult to predict how the model would work in different contexts, the evidence indicates that the model is successful in South Westland due to a specific convergence of features: a highly seasonal tourism sector; limited opportunities for alternative work in the tourism off season; and geographic proximity to the conservation estate. South Westland's tourism offering is highly integrated with the natural environment, with a symbiotic relationship between tourism and conservation. Interviews with local stakeholders also indicated that threats to the region's tourism industry related to climate change have created a motivation and interest for tourism business to contribute to nature-based initiatives.

This creates a set of circumstances that are not easily replicable, and indicates that there are a limited number of other regions in which a similar tourism-conservation workforce sharing model could be implemented in the expectation of similar outcomes. While other areas with a high reliance on tourism, such as Queenstown or Rotorua, may be suitable the unique set of circumstances of South Westland are not replicated. For example, Queenstown's tourism industry is less seasonal with opportunities for summer and winter employment. Rotorua has less reliance on tourism, and offers alternative employment opportunities such as agriculture, forestry and wood processing. However, this study did not include a detailed investigation of the potential to roll out the workforce model in other regions, and these findings should be interpreted with caution.



KEQ 4.1: Would a self-funding and/or non-government funded model be viable?

The evaluation finds that a fully self-funded model would not be viable. A hybrid funding model offers potential for ongoing sustainability of the programme.

Tourism businesses indicated limited ability to contribute to an ongoing funding model.

The evaluation investigated the extent to which the J4N model could be funded through a model that does not involve government investment. As part of the qualitative fieldwork, we asked business operators (including medium-large enterprises and small owner-operators) whether they would be prepared and able to contribute to the cost of running the J4N project, should it be extended. About 90 percent of the business operators interviewed stated that they do not have adequate resource to contribute on a full user-pays basis for their staff to engage over the winter in the project. However, about half indicated that they would consider contributing a small amount towards operating costs. National and local stakeholder organisations also considered that a full user-pays approach is unlikely to be successful.

We are still getting back on our feet after COVID, and our business still isn't where it was [pre-pandemic]. We can't afford more than a small contribution to extend the programme. (Business operator)

Post-COVID sustainability is likely to involve a hybrid model.

The above finding suggests that a full cost recovery basis is unlikely, but partial cost recovery may be possible. The International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL), introduced in 2019, offers a potential funding source. The IVL is intended for projects that create productive, sustainable and inclusive tourism growth that protects and supports our environment, including the infrastructure visitors use while they're in New Zealand. National and community stakeholder organisations considered that the objectives of the IVL align with that of the J4N South Westland project and therefore offers potential as a partial funding source.

As discussed in KEQ4.1, the current tourism policy settings are favourable. The project aligns well with the domains of the Treasury Living Standards Framework, particularly under the individual and collective wellbeing domain. This may provide the opportunity to seek a central government budgetary allocation for the programme.

In addition, South Westland-based stakeholder organisations, including economic development entities and local government, stated that the success of the project is well recognised in the region, and that there is likely to be a local appetite for organisational contribution to funding through vehicles such as the local government Long Term Plans.

The evaluation findings indicate that the development of a sustainable funding model is likely to involve a hybrid of user pays from businesses, and central and local government funding contributions.



4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out overall conclusions related to the South Westland J4N project, framed around the themes of interest identified in Table 1 in section 2.2. It provides overall evaluative judgements for each theme, indicating the extent of the impacts of the project on various outcomes. Finally, this section addresses key evaluation question 5 ('are there areas where the South Westland J4N project could be improved?') by offering recommendations for consideration, should the model continue past the end of the current funding period.

4.1 Evaluative conclusions

4.1.1.1 Effectiveness of the joint workforce model

<i>Insignificant impact</i>	<i>Minor impact</i>	<i>Moderate impact</i>	<i>High impact</i>	<i>Very high impact</i>

The evaluation finds that the South Westland J4N project **had high impact** on the achievement of the objectives of the joint workforce model. The workforce sharing arrangements provided an effective mechanism to allow tourism business operators (including owner-operators and larger enterprises) to offer additional work to employees during the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided an additional income stream for tourism businesses in a context of substantial revenue loss, which enabled them to continue operating, albeit at reduced capacity. Importantly, the ability to offer work through the J4N project enabled business operators to retain their core staff, halting a pattern of rising unemployment and people leaving the South Westland region. The workforce sharing arrangements were effective in offering secure work, giving business the confidence to remain open and employees the confidence to stay in the South Westland region.

The provision of training (both on the job and through formal accreditation) as part of the model has the potential to build the transferrable skill base of the tourism workforce. There was limited evidence that participants in this evaluation have used the skills they acquired outside of their specific J4N role, the broadening of workforce skills may enhance the adaptability of the tourism workforce in the medium to long term. This aspect of the model could be strengthened as a means to broaden the capacity of the environmental workforce.

4.1.1.2 Outcomes for communities

<i>Insignificant impact</i>	<i>Minor impact</i>	<i>Moderate impact</i>	<i>High impact</i>	<i>Very high impact</i>

The evaluation concluded that the South Westland J4N project **had high to very high impacts** on communities. Overall, the findings indicate that the J4N project delivered significant social and human benefit for the communities in the South Westland region. The



model included embedded features that were effective in promoting community cohesion and collaboration, which had benefits for the social fabric of the community.

The project delivery model required collaboration between the tourism and conservation sectors, which were reported to have previously had a somewhat antagonistic relationship. Working together to deliver the project strengthened relationships between DOC, business operators, and mana whenua, as well as between tourism businesses. This had social and economic benefits for the community, resulting in more collaborative business practices such as referring clients. There is evidence that these practices are continuing as international tourism is beginning to reopen.

The J4N project enhances the symbiotic economic relationship between tourism and conservation in the region. The project has directed substantial resources into the conservation estate, improving the nature-based offering to domestic and international visitors, supporting the economic sustainability and value of the tourism industry of the region.

The J4N project has potential to support a realignment of the tourism sector towards a regenerative model, through building buy-in of the tourism sector to the value of a regenerative approach. The evaluation found little evidence that this shift is occurring at present, but recognises that this is a medium to long term objective.

4.1.1.3 Outcomes for participants

<i>Insignificant impact</i>	<i>Minor impact</i>	<i>Moderate impact</i>	<i>High impact</i>	<i>Very high impact</i>

The evaluation concluded that the South Westland J4N project **had high to very high impacts** on participants. The J4N project represented an economic 'lifeline' for its participant business and employees. The immediate economic outcomes included enabling tourism business operators to avoid permanent closure and supported their ability to reopen when visitors returned to the region. The project also provided a stable source of income for employees which supported their individual and family wellbeing and allowed them to remain in South Westland.

The evaluation also found substantial social and mental wellbeing outcomes were achieved through the project. The uncertainty of the border closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic had undermined the wellbeing of business operators and employees, triggering feelings of stress and worry. This was primarily due to the economic upheaval caused by plummeting visitor numbers to the region. The J4N project was a significant contributor to improved mental wellbeing through providing opportunities to engage in meaningful work, connection with nature, and social opportunities for participants. While physical wellbeing was a less commonly reported outcome, there is some evidence of increased fitness in those undertaking physical work tasks. Overall, the project outcomes align with the Living Standards Framework individual and collective wellbeing domains.

The evaluation also found benefits for mana whenua, particularly in terms of strengthened connection to whenua through taking on further responsibility as kaitiaki, supporting hapū



members to remain in the rohe through providing work opportunities, and bringing mātauranga Māori perspectives into environmental work.

4.1.1.4 Potential to extend the J4N South Westland project

This is a descriptive question, and as such does not have an evaluative judgement attached. The evaluation concludes that the J4N model has **good potential to be extended** beyond the end of the currently contracted timeframe of July 2023, but that the scale of the initiative is likely to be smaller than its present format.

The qualitative and quantitative evidence shows that there is interest from stakeholders within the tourism and conservation sectors to extend the model. The evaluation found that there is likely to be strong uptake of an extended programme amongst tourism businesses, but that workforce participation is likely to be lower than in the COVID-19 context. The demand for nature-based work from those businesses and employees that do participate is also likely to be lower as the international tourism market begins to recover. Demand is projected to be highly seasonal, and extending the model will require efforts to align the conservation work programme with the tourism low season.

An extended model would allow a secure income source for the core tourism workforce, providing economic benefits through cost savings for tourism businesses in minimising the need to rehire and retrain staff, and through the additional spending of workers in local businesses. The extension of the shared workforce model would support the ongoing development of a regenerative tourism model, given the business and employee participants are likely to be those have long term ties to the region and are invested in the ongoing success of its tourism offering.

The evaluation concludes that a full cost-recovery model, funded through participant business contributions, would not be feasible. Businesses were clear that they are not willing or able to contribute more than a nominal amount to the running costs of the programme. While it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to fully investigate funding options, initial indications are that a hybrid model of a business participant contribution, central government funding, and local government/organisation grants. It is also noted that the programme may have lower administration costs should it be extended due to the likely reduced scale of employee participation in the programme.

4.2 Learning and recommendations

KEQ 5.1: Are there areas where the South Westland J4N project could be improved, if they were to continue past the end of the funding period in 2023?

Based on the findings outlined in this report, the evaluation has captured the following key learnings and recommendations to consider if the South Westland J4N project was extended beyond 2023.

- 1. Continue to allocate dedicated project management resource within the community.**



The evaluation findings highlight the importance of having a locally-led project management approach. The ongoing success of the project would be supported by continuing to allocate resource to a dedicated project manager who has links to the community and can drive it at the local level.

2. Confirm the ability to align the conservation work programme with the tourism low season.

The success of the project hinges in its ability to match labour supply with available nature-based tasks. The evaluation findings indicate that an extended project is likely to be seasonally driven, and it will be vital for the conservation work programme to offer tasks that can be effectively undertaken during winter months. Indicative findings suggest that there is some flexibility to adjust work programmes to the availability of labour, but this will need to be formally confirmed before the project is extended.

3. Embed flexibility into the workforce sharing model.

The evaluation found that flexibility is a critical success factor for the project, and that the assurance that the tourism workforce would be available when needed was a key incentive to business participation in the project. This should continue to be embedded as a core feature of programme delivery.

4. Enhance the qualifications pathway.

The evaluation found that previously it was difficult for the tourism workforce to access conservation training but, this barrier was overcome through offering formal and informal training programmes. The programme aims of creating an adaptable workforce with transferrable skills would be enhanced by further development of the qualifications process. This could include expanding the existing NMIT Conservation Training Scheme to offer further NZQA-endorsed qualifications, so that employees achieve formally recognised accreditation for the competencies they develop through the project.

5. Embed an explicit focus on regenerative tourism into the programme theory of change/ outcomes framework.

A continuation of the project would provide an opportunity to reframe the anticipated outcomes of the projects. Given the national tourism policy settings have a focus on regenerative tourism, this should be explicitly reflected in the South Westland J4N theory of change, which will in turn inform the delivery of programme activities in a way that supports this aim.

5.0 APPENDIX 1: DETAILED METHODOLOGY

Data collection and fieldwork

We collected a mix of qualitative and quantitative data through fieldwork, a document review and secondary data analysis between 16 November 2022 and 27 January 2023, which has been used to inform the findings of the evaluation.

Further information about each of these activities is provided below.

Key informant interviews

The evaluation conducted four key informant interviews with seven key stakeholders involved in the design, management and/or implementation of the South WestlandJ4N project. The interviewees were representatives of central government agencies, including the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Conservation. Representatives from the Ministry for the Environment were also invited to participate but considered that a regional perspective would be more valuable than a central government one, and therefore declined participation.

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide based on the key evaluation questions and focus areas identified in the evaluation plan. The interviews assisted in scoping the evaluation, and sought national level perspectives on views on the extent to which the programme is achieving its intended outcomes. The interviews took between 30 and 75 minutes.

Most interviews took place using Zoom or Microsoft Teams video conferencing software, which allowed for changes in COVID-19 Alert Levels during the data collection period, although one was conducted in person.

Each interview was carried out by two members of the evaluation team (one to interview and one to take notes). Participants were interviewed individually or in small groups, and informed consent was obtained prior to the start of each interview. We also ensured that interviewees remained confidential in this evaluation report and specific quotes have generic descriptors to protect the identity of participants. The descriptor for these interviewees is 'national stakeholder organisation'.

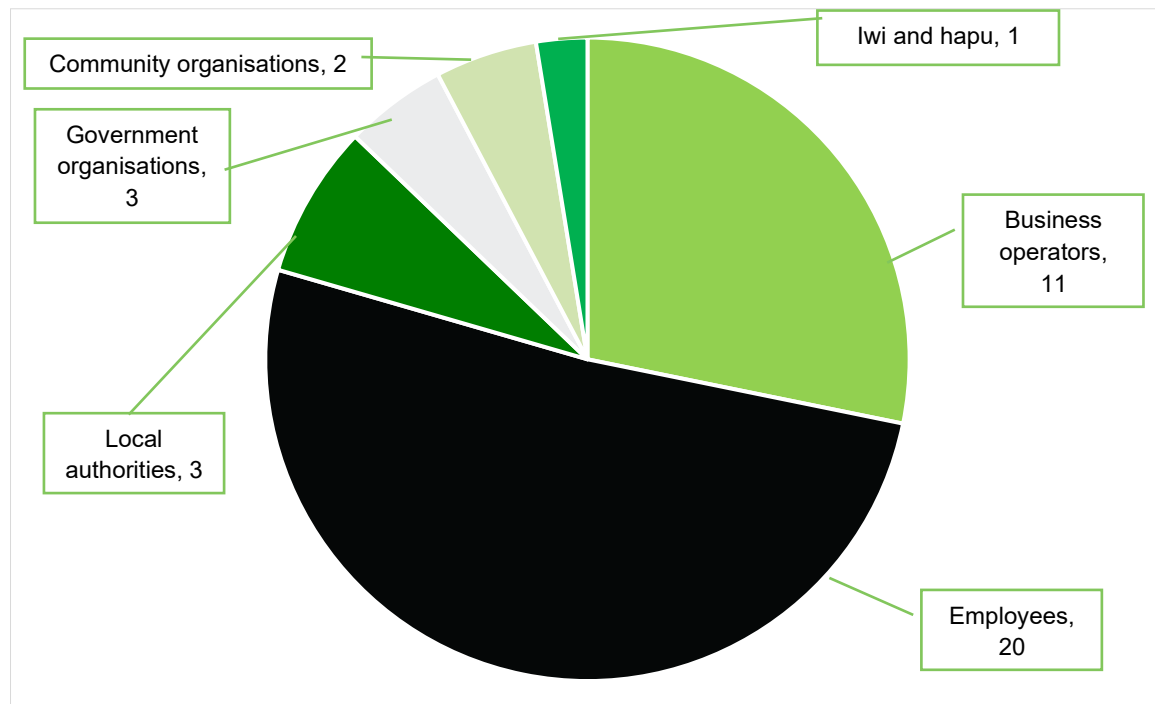
Site visit to South Westland

Two members of the evaluation team undertook a five-day site visit to the South Westland region to conduct qualitative interviews with business operators, employees and other stakeholder organisations.

Participants were recruited using a non-random, purposive sampling technique. We were provided with a list of stakeholder organisations and individuals by MBIE and invited selected stakeholders to attend an interview or focus group. We also recruited further people, particularly employees, using a snowball sampling technique while onsite in South Westland.

The evaluation team engaged with 39 people in total during the site visit and subsequent online interviews. The figure below shows the number of interviewees by case study, cohort, and role.

Figure 4: Site visit engagements by interviewee type



Two evaluators attended each engagement. The focus groups and interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide which covered the KEQs and focus areas of interest for the evaluation. Each group had a different role in the J4N project, and varying levels of involvement with its implementation. Therefore, we ensured that the content of the focus groups was tailored towards the participants' role in the J4N project. Employees that were interviewed received a \$50 voucher as koha to thank them for their contribution to the evaluation.

Analysis of documents

We reviewed 22 key documents related to the J4N project in South Westland and the national level programme. This review provided contextual information on the programme and supported our analysis of its effectiveness and outcomes.

The documents included the following grouped list of documents:

- policy documentation, including the Jobs for Nature Cabinet paper and Investment Framework, the Treasury Living Standard Framework, and the Tourism ITP draft Better Work Action Plan
- documentation related to the implementation of the projects, including the contract agreement for South Westland J4N



- presentations and reports on the South Westland J4N programme developed by stakeholder organisations, notes from stakeholder meetings and workshops
- the bi-monthly South Westland J4N newsletter.

The information collected in the document review was used to compare and contrast against the qualitative findings, and to provide contextual information where relevant.

Quantitative data analysis

The main quantitative data source was administrative data on the South Westland J4N projects, provided by the Department of Conservation. The data provided a monthly breakdown of the total hours worked in the programme, number of people participating, and spend on wages, training and administration.

The evaluation drew on the results of a survey undertaken by Development West Coast, published in October 2021.

We also accessed publicly available contextual data on the contribution of tourism to the West Coast GDP. These data were accessed from Infometrics.

Quantitative data were analysed in Excel and presented as descriptive charts.