NATIONAL WILDING CONIFER CONTROL PROGRAMME

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NZWCMS Refresh – Workshop and Hui Synthesis (July 2026)

Document Control

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1. Introduction

This document synthesises feedback from the Strategy Working Group workshop (21 May 2026), the Ngāi Tahu hui (2 June 2026), the Partner and Stakeholder workshop (17 June 2026), the Tuahuriri hui (18 June 2026) and Te Tau Ihu hui (7 July 2026)[1]. It also synthesises feedback from two written submissions[2].

Across all engagements, participants recognised that the programme has made significant progress, including effective national coordination, strong grassroots leadership and action, major investment, and large-scale management. However, there was clear agreement that the next phase should shift from a tightly focused pest-led model to a more enduring, place-based approach. This involves embedding wilding management within broader land use systems and, where possible and appropriate, transitioning to landowner-led stewardship, so that managing wilding risk becomes a routine part of everyday land stewardship. And grounding this in strong community ownership, with local groups, iwi, and land managers collectively shaping priorities and driving action to deliver durable, place-based outcomes.

The synthesis below is structured around the key thematic areas identified during the discovery stage and confirmed as the right areas (this was tested, including a focus on any gaps) during hui and workshops.

[1] Note that additional hui have been offered, and some iwi, hapu or Runanga have not been able to meet yet (several additional hui are planned from the week starting 6 July 2026 and will influence the next stage of drafting), while others have requested involvement at the next stage when the draft NZWCMS is released for consultation.

[2] Written submissions were received from Ngati Rangi and Tākaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust

2. Treaty Partnership and Place-Based Working

Heading towards more effective partnership

Feedback highlighted strong support for the intent of Treaty partnership within the programme, alongside opportunities to further strengthen how this is realised in practice. Participants acknowledged that meaningful partnership requires earlier and more consistent involvement of Mana Whenua, particularly in shaping priorities and investment decisions, rather than engaging once these have largely been determined.

There was a shared view that this reflects not a lack of commitment, but a need to better align programme processes with Māori governance and decision-making approaches, which are typically collective, iterative, and grounded in engagement with whānau and rūnanga. Participants emphasised that enabling this requires both sufficient time and appropriate processes, so that input can be developed, tested, and brought forward in a way that reflects broader community perspectives.

At the local level, participants also identified an opportunity to strengthen expectations around engagement with iwi in delivery, particularly for community-led initiatives. Aligning local practice more closely with national partnership aspirations was seen as an important step in achieving consistent and enduring outcomes.

Participants noted that many iwi have both stewardship responsibilities and interests as forest landowners, creating a need for policy settings and management approaches that recognise these interconnected roles and responsibilities.

What effective partnership looks like in practice

Across the hui and workshops, there was strong alignment on what effective partnership would look like going forward. Participants described a model based on shared decision-making and collective ownership, where iwi and hapū are actively involved in shaping direction, rather than consultation and responding to proposals.

In practical terms, this includes:

- Governance arrangements that are inclusive of Treaty partners and safe for representatives [Note the current proposed structure (e.g., a single national Māori representative) is not fit for purpose and cannot reflect the diversity of iwi/hapū perspectives. The structure is part of the problem – a single seat at the Governance level would create a very difficult position for any one individual, and it has been hard to find a representative as the structure is not a good or safe one and needs to be reconsidered.]
- Early involvement of iwi and hapū in priority-setting at different scales to ensure cultural values are appropriately considered, and mana whenua in priority-setting and resource allocation at place
- Recognising that meaningful participation requires time, capability, and appropriate resourcing
- Building ongoing, trust-based relationships, rather than transactional engagement processes

Importantly, participants emphasised that partnership must operate across all levels of the system simultaneously—from national governance through to regional prioritisation and local decision-making and delivery.

Building iwi capability, procurement opportunities, environmental employment pathways and rangatahi engagement was identified as an important co-benefit of long-term wilding management investment.

Embedding cultural values in prioritisation

Feedback emphasised the importance of ensuring that cultural values actively shape decision-making, particularly in relation to prioritisation of management efforts. It also emphasised that success is not simply about removing trees, but about protecting and restoring places of cultural significance, including:

- Mahika kai sites
- Wāhi tūpuna and culturally significant landscapes
- Areas closely connected to identity, whakapapa, and ongoing use

There was strong support for developing approaches that enable these values to be systematically reflected in prioritisation frameworks, alongside operational and economic considerations.

The importance of time, process, and sequencing

A key insight from the hui is that effective partnership is as much about how engagement happens as it is about who is involved.

Participants highlighted that Māori engagement processes typically involve iterative discussion and validation across whānau and governance structures, which cannot be meaningfully achieved within short timeframes. As a result, ensuring sufficient time for engagement is not simply a logistical consideration, but a critical enabler of authentic partnership.

Providing adequate time and early signals for engagement enables:

- More considered and representative input
- Stronger alignment with iwi and hapū priorities
- Greater trust in both the process and the outcomes

Participants emphasised that designing engagement approaches with this in mind will support more durable, trusted, and effective partnerships over time.

Note that as a result of this feedback, the Governance Group has agreed to an extended consultation period (eight weeks) on the draft NZWCMS. This will commence at the WPN Conference on 13 August 2026 and conclude on 9 October 2026.

4. SWOT and Critical Shifts

A consolidated SWOT is included in Figure 1, below. Critical shifts identified included:

Critical shift	*Current state*	*The key shift*	*Future state*
1. Develop more strategic prioritisation of investment and locations	• Investment pro-rata based on historic investment (w/local prioritisation/ different values and priorities between regions)	• Develop and agree frameworks, including to fairly measure values + time/resourcing	• Transparent, repeatable, scalable, consistent national process
2. Potential for policy/regulatory reform (national rules, pest management frameworks)	• Current regulatory frameworks have obstacles/inconsistency between regions and fairness and efficacy of rules (not dealing with legacy issues)	• Shift to national regulatory framework, e.g. NPMP, (RMA)	• NPMP and management agency, with nationally consistent measures in place to ensure legacy issues are addressed and a complete suite of rules that address the full range of risk
3. Limited public awareness and understanding, especially urban audiences	• Apathy, fragmented understanding nationally, story is complex and no personal connection	• Reframing wildings as pest conifers, create a personal connection to wildings – make it real and tangible for all	• Sense of urgency and understanding, ownership, across NZ communities, understanding of forest vs wildings

Other key shifts included:

- Expanded coverage to ensure all parts of New Zealand are included, not just current programme areas
- Need for clearer pathway to transition and thresholds for transition
- Monitor and document success, both pines controlled and positive impacts (economic, biodiversity, etc.)
- Better integration of science, data, and operational knowledge.
- Education and enforcement of landowner responsibilities
- Consistency of funding

Figure 1. SWOT

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
a. Strong collaboration model across agencies, communities, and stakeholders b. Well-established networks and community support, including grassroots engagement c. Demonstrated programme success and credibility (deliverables, outcomes, >2M ha managed) d. Strong regional knowledge, operational capability, and ongoing innovation, including delivery in complex and challenging environments e. Solid data, experience, and understanding of the problem f. Strong cost-benefit case and environmental/economic value proposition	a. Uncertain and insufficient funding, often short-term and inconsistent b. Fragmented coordination (science, agencies, operations) and siloed delivery c. Limited public awareness and understanding, especially urban audiences, constraining wider support and engagement d. Gaps in regulation and enforcement, including unmanaged seed sources and externalities e. Capacity constraints (staff stretched, high overheads, inefficiencies) f. Lack of clarity in prioritisation, values protected, and long-term direction g. Insufficient integration of science, monitoring and evidence into decision-making
Opportunities	**Threats**
a. Secure sustained, multi-year and diversified investment aligned with beneficiaries, industry, and wider public good outcomes b. Strengthen national coordination (science, regulation, programme delivery) c. Leverage advances in technology and innovation (e.g. remote sensing, drones, data systems, and emerging tools) to improve efficiency and effectiveness d. Improve engagement with forestry sector including closer alignment of data, risk management and shared control efforts e. Build public awareness and social licence through clearer storytelling and evidence f. Develop more transparent, consistent, and scalable prioritisation frameworks to guide strategic investment and decision-making g. Advance policy and regulatory reform to improve national consistency h. (national rules, pest management frameworks) i. Expand data integration, monitoring, use of case studies and knowledge-sharing across programmes, sectors, and regions to support a learning system j. Strengthen integration of wilding management with broader landscape restoration, biodiversity, and land-use systems	a. Ongoing funding reductions and shifting government priorities b. Public and political perceptions (low awareness, resistance to control methods, social licence risks) c. Complacency, apathy, or loss of stakeholder support over time d. Loss of community capability, local knowledge, and trusted delivery partners if programmes are not sustained e. f. Regulatory and operational constraints (herbicide use, compliance, H&S) limiting cost-effective and timely delivery g. Persistent and unmanaged seed sources and spread risk h. Climate change and environmental risks (e.g. fire risk, extreme weather, changing ecosystems) amplifying spread and complicating management i. Economic and land-use pressures prioritising private benefit over collective environmental outcomes and long-term stewardship j. Risk of misallocated investment reducing programme effectiveness

5. Vision, Success, and Strategic Direction

What success looks like

There was strong agreement that success would mean:

- Wilding conifers are no longer degrading landscapes, with infestation reduced to manageable levels
- No new large-scale invasions occur, due to prevention embedded in land-use decisions
- Landowners take responsibility for wilding management as part of normal land stewardship practice
- System costs reduce over time as control gives way to maintenance and prevention

Success must be visible and demonstrable. Participants noted that while problems are highly visible (e.g. widespread infestations), success is often difficult to see, making it harder to sustain support. This led to strong emphasis on:

- Developing clear indicators of progress
- Using visual tools (e.g. imagery, mapping) to show what has been prevented or improved
- Demonstrating outcomes at landscape scale (e.g. “this area is now clear”)

From the hui, success is explicitly intergenerational. Participants described success as:

- Reducing the burden for future generations (mokopuna)
- Restoring ecosystems in ways that support cultural identity and practice
- Embedding long-term partnership and trust
- Increased public and community understanding of wilding conifer impacts, management benefits, and responsibilities for long-term stewardship.

Participants agreed that success should be defined by outcomes rather than activities alone. There was caution about relying solely on measures such as hectares treated or trees removed. Instead, success should reflect improvements in environmental, cultural and community outcomes.

Overall descriptors of success were:

(a) Major wilding conifer seed sources are removed or effectively managed so they no longer drive landscape-scale spread.

(b) Landscapes are stable and resilient, supporting their intended ecological, cultural, or productive use with wilding conifers excluded, eliminated, progressively contained or controlled to minimise adverse effects on NZ’s landscapes.

(c) Environmental, cultural, social, and economic outcomes achieved, including healthier ecosystems and indigenous biodiversity, protected cultural values, resilient landscapes, and empowered communities.

(d) Wilding conifer management transitions from periodic, large-scale interventions to enduring and affordable landowner stewardship, embedded in everyday sustainable catchment land management practice.

(e) Enduring, place-based partnerships with Māori are embedded, enabling meaningful involvement in decision-making at all levels, delivery, and long-term stewardship and sustainable iwi and community capability.

(f) Wilding conifer management is delivered through strong partnerships between the Crown, landholders, iwi/hapū, communities, and those whose activities or interests both contribute to the problem and benefit from its management.

(g) Limited resources are focused where they matter most, guided by clear and defensible priorities.

(h) Science/Mātauranga and innovation are applied in practice, improving effectiveness, outcomes and lowering management costs over time.

(i) Progress is measurable, visible, and well-communicated, building public trust, understanding, social licence, and long-term commitment.

(j) There is durable public support for, and community and landowner commitment to sustain, wilding conifer management.

Vision and goals

Participants strongly supported a vision that is:

- Clear and compelling
- Easy to communicate (similar to Predator Free NZ)
- Focused on outcomes, not activities

There was also a strong preference to avoid anchoring the vision to a fixed date, as this could undermine credibility or urgency.

A key insight from discussion is that the vision must balance:

- Ambition (e.g. elimination in priority areas)
- Realism (recognising scale and feasibility)

Potential vision statements raised across workshops and hui were:

- ✓ Wilding Conifer-Free Aotearoa
- ✓ Pest Conifer Free Landscapes are Valued and Defended
- ✓ Wilding Conifer-Free Landscapes
- ✓ Right Land Use Right Place
- ✓ Wildings in Retreat
- ✓ Wildings in Retreat in Aotearoa

Guiding principles

Across all engagements, principles converged around:

- Prevention-first
- Intergenerational thinking
- Partnership and shared responsibility
- Evidence-based and adaptive management
- Place-based approaches

The hui added further depth, emphasising:

- Kaitiakitanga and rangatiratanga as foundational
- Recognition of interconnected systems (whakapapa)
- Recognition of cumulative pressures including wilding conifers, climate change, biodiversity decline and other ecosystem stressors.
- The importance of cultural values in guiding decisions

Overall emergent guiding principles were:

- Treaty partnership and shared governance: Wilding conifer management is underpinned by enduring, trusted Treaty partnerships with shared decision-making, accountability, and meaningful iwi/hapū participation at all levels.
- Kaitiakitanga and intergenerational stewardship: Management reflects a long-term, intergenerational commitment to protecting and restoring the mauri of landscapes for future generations.
- Prevention-first approach: Preventing new seed sources and spread is prioritised ahead of control, embedding risk reduction into land use decisions and management practice.
- Landscape-scale, systems thinking: Decisions and actions are taken at a whole-of-landscape scale, recognising interconnected ecological, cultural, and production systems and cumulative pressures of different environmental stressors.
- Place-based and locally led: Management is grounded in local context, values, and knowledge, enabling tailored approaches and empowering communities and landowners.
- Value-driven prioritisation: Resources are directed to where they achieve the greatest benefit, guided by transparent, evidence-based frameworks reflecting ecological, cultural, and economic values.
- Evidence-based and adaptive management: Decisions are informed by the best available science, mātauranga Māori, and operational knowledge, with a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.
- Collective responsibility and accountability: Managing wilding conifers is a shared responsibility across landowners, industry, communities, and government, with clear expectations and accountability for action.

- Sustainable, enduring management: Approaches prioritise long-term affordability and resilience, transitioning from large-scale interventions to routine stewardship embedded in normal land management.
- Integration with restoration and wider systems: Management goes beyond tree removal to align with wider ecosystem restoration and broader biosecurity, catchment, and land management outcomes and initiatives.

6. Managing Risk, Transition, and Trade-offs

Emerging risks and seed sources

Participants emphasised the growing complexity of risk, including:

- Expansion of carbon forestry
- Ongoing unmanaged seed sources
- Land-use change and climate pressures

A recurring theme was that externalities are not being effectively managed, with some land-use decisions creating costs borne elsewhere in the system.

Participants also noted that unclear definitions (e.g. “legacy seed sources”) create confusion and hinder consistent action.

Transition to landowner stewardship

Transition was consistently identified as a critical but under-developed component of the system. Participants emphasised that transition is not a single handover point, but a progressive, staged process that must be actively designed and managed over time, including at sub-property scale where parts of land may be ready earlier than others.

There was strong concern that current approaches lack clarity and consistency. In particular:

- Transition is often poorly defined, with limited objective criteria or measures for when land is “ready”
- It is not sufficiently flexible, despite variation in land condition, risk, and landowner capability
- The system does not yet adequately incentivise successful transition to sustained landowner management

Participants highlighted that successful transition requires both behavioural and system change. This includes:

- Early and explicit communication that programme support is time-limited, shaping expectations from the outset
- Building landowner awareness, capability, and ownership, so stewardship becomes business-as-usual land management
- Tailored support pathways reflecting risk, cost, and end land use, including access to affordable, practical control tools

- Integration with broader land management systems (e.g. catchment and farm plans), rather than operating in isolation

Participants emphasised that long-term success will depend not only on building landowner capability but also influencing the decisions and behaviours that create or reduce wilding risk over time. There was a strong view that management systems should encourage proactive stewardship through a combination of incentives, clear expectations, practical support, and accountability mechanisms. Participants noted that unless the underlying behavioural and economic drivers of spread are addressed, the system risks repeatedly investing in control rather than preventing future problems.

Critically, transition must be sustainable and resilient over the long term. Participants stressed the need for supporting settings—regulation, compliance, data, and cost-effective management tools—alongside mechanisms to re-engage if control is lost. The latter includes:

- Mechanisms for re-entry of programme support if areas deteriorate
- Recognition that transition is iterative, with some areas requiring longer-term support

Participants highlighted that transition to landowner stewardship is particularly challenging where the Crown is the landowner, noting a large proportion of the problem sits on public land. Participants noted that successful transition in these areas depends on a fundamental shift in Crown responsibility and sustained commitment, as ineffective management on Crown land creates disproportionate downstream risk for others. There was a strong view that progress hinges on improving accountability, resourcing, and decision-making for Crown agencies, including clearer mandates and alignment with programme objectives. Importantly, reliance on short-term or uncertain funding was seen as a major barrier, with participants emphasising that Crown-managed land requires ongoing, long-term investment and political will to support transition rather than episodic intervention.

Ultimately, transition must be practical, achievable, and perceived as fair and equitable, with shared responsibility and clear accountability, to maintain trust and avoid reversion of the problem.

Trade-offs and prioritisation

Prioritisation was identified as a critical driver of programme effectiveness but remains inconsistent and insufficiently developed. Current approaches are often fragmented, locally driven, and influenced by historical investment patterns, rather than guided by a transparent, nationally consistent framework.

Participants emphasised the need to move toward a clear, evidence-based prioritisation system that can operate consistently across regions while remaining adaptable to local context. Key elements include:

- A transparent and repeatable framework that can be applied nationally, supporting difficult trade-offs and maintaining trust
- Stronger alignment between national direction and regional implementation
- Integration of multiple values and outcomes, for example, protecting productive land uses, safeguarding indigenous biodiversity and ecosystem function, maintaining water yield and natural resource systems, preserving landscape, social and cultural values (including

protection of mahinga kai, wāhi tūpuna, wāhi tapu and other culturally significant places, whakapapa connections, and the mauri of landscapes for current and future generations), and reducing downstream risks, impacts, and long-term management costs.

There was widespread recognition that prioritisation must also evolve to support long-term outcomes, not just immediate control. This includes:

- Greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention, particularly protecting vulnerable, uninvaded areas
- Incorporating pathways to transition, recognising where investment leads to sustainable landowner stewardship
- Considering end land use and landscape resilience, ensuring investment supports durable outcomes rather than short-term gains

Participants also stressed the importance of resourcing prioritisation itself and ensuring that local knowledge (including knowledge of local contractors) is captured in decision making.

Ultimately, prioritisation must be credible, fair, and evidence-based, enabling the programme to direct limited resources to where they will have the greatest long-term impact, while maintaining partner confidence and social licence.

7. Science/Mātauranga, Data, and Technology

Participants strongly supported better use of knowledge, tools, and data, but identified a critical gap in how these are funded and applied. While significant science and research capability exists, the benefits of this have not been fully realised (or even close).

A key issue raised across workshops was that applied science sits between systems—it is often not eligible for Crown programme funding yet is also not prioritised within the MBIE-funded national science system. As a result, investment in the application of tools, operational methods, and decision-support systems remains insufficient, despite clear demand from delivery partners.

Participants emphasised the need of end-user-driven science, with closer collaboration between researchers, contractors, iwi/hapū, and decision-makers. Opportunities identified across workshops and hui include:

- Expanded use of remote sensing, drones, and AI-assisted mapping to improve detection and monitoring
- Improved risk modelling, seed source mapping, and forecasting tools to support prioritisation and planning
- Integration of mātauranga Māori with science, particularly in defining values, monitoring outcomes, and enabling place-based approaches
- Development of more cost-effective and scalable control methods, and better guidance on tool selection in different contexts

Across workshops, a consistent theme was that data and evidence must underpin the system. Current approaches rely too heavily on subjective judgement. As noted, “if we don’t measure it, we can’t manage it.”

There was a consistent view that while tools and ideas exist, they have not been fully developed or deployed due to lack of applied funding pathways. Examples included:

- Remote sensing, AI, and drone-based detection: capability exists and is advancing, but investment to scale, integrate, and operationalise these tools nationally has been limited, slowing uptake and consistency.
- Risk modelling and decision-support tools: participants noted that risk calculators, infestation scoring, and prioritisation frameworks are only partially developed or inconsistently applied, despite clear demand—reflecting underinvestment in translating research into usable operational tools.
- Seed source mapping and national data integration: while local systems and innovations exist, the lack of coordinated funding has meant missed opportunities to build nationally consistent, shared datasets to support planning and prioritisation.
- Mātauranga Māori integration: the hui highlighted that cultural knowledge is not yet fully embedded in monitoring, prioritisation, or outcomes frameworks, partly due to insufficient investment in capability, co-development, and long-term partnerships.

More broadly, participants noted that innovation has often been incremental rather than transformative, and that with appropriate resourcing the opportunity ahead is for transformation.

8. Regulation, Delivery, and Funding

Regulation

Participants consistently identified gaps and inconsistencies in current regulatory settings. Key issues include variation across regions, limited ability to address legacy seed sources and externalities, and a lack of clear, enforceable, and fair rules.

There was broad support for moving toward a more nationally consistent framework, including tools such as a National Pest Management Plan (noting the Minister's recent announcement that there will be a NPMP, which was strongly supported). Participants emphasised that regulation must:

- Better support prevention, particularly around new and high-risk plantings
- Apply consistently and equitably across sectors and landowners
- Address both existing legacy issues and future risk
- Be complemented by education, incentives, and voluntary approaches, rather than relying on enforcement alone

Participants noted that the RMA and NES-CF (including introduction and recent update of the Wilding Conifer Risk Calculator) provide a useful foundation for managing wilding risk, particularly in guiding land-use decisions and new plantings. However, they emphasised that implementation is variable across regions and can at times limit the use of efficient control methods or create uncertainty. The ongoing RMA reform process was seen as a positive opportunity to improve alignment, clarify roles, and enable more consistent, outcomes-focused settings.

Participants also noted that while the NES-CF supports risk management for commercial forestry, its application is limited to forest activities above specified thresholds (generally plantings of 1 hectare

or more), meaning many smaller sources—such as shelterbelts and amenity plantings—fall outside its scope.

Overall, regulation was seen as essential to providing clarity, accountability, and fairness, while enabling effective long-term management. There was also support for more integrated and enabling national and local planning frameworks that support both effective control and long-term stewardship.

Delivery model

The current delivery model was recognised as strong, with high operational capability, effective collaboration, and increasing professionalism across the system. This provides a solid foundation to build from as the programme evolves.

However, participants identified opportunities to improve efficiency and performance. A key theme was fragmentation and duplication, with regions and organisations sometimes developing or applying parallel approaches (e.g. data systems, mapping, and planning tools). There is clear potential to reduce costs and accelerate progress through shared services and greater use of nationally consistent platforms, such as WCIS, particularly for data, prioritisation, and decision support.

Limited integration with industry, landowners, community groups and wider land management systems was also highlighted. Participants emphasised the benefits of aligning wilding control more closely with forestry operations, farm systems, and catchment programmes, to strengthen alignment with other sustainable land management initiatives.

Both national and regional procurement and contracting models were identified as a practical constraint. Current approaches can be inflexible and short-term, limiting the ability to scale operations, retain workforce capability, and invest in more efficient methods. More flexible, longer-term arrangements could enable better sequencing of work, stronger contractor capability, better utilisation of local knowledge and greater cost-effectiveness.

Looking ahead, participants noted that upcoming decisions on a National Pest Management Plan (NPMP) and the role of a management agency provide an opportunity to address system-level issues. In the nearer term, improvements in coordination, shared capability, and contracting flexibility could deliver immediate efficiency gains and stronger outcomes.

Funding certainty and cost sharing

Funding was identified as a critical enabler, with recent additional Crown investment seen as a positive signal of commitment and an opportunity to accelerate progress. However, participants emphasised that short-term and uncertain funding cycles still constrain planning, scalability, and efficiency, particularly for long-term control and transition to landowner stewardship.

There was strong support for more stable, multi-year funding certainty to protect earlier gains and enable strategic, landscape-scale delivery.

Participants also highlighted the need to improve fairness and alignment in cost sharing, noting that costs do not always reflect those who benefit from management or create risk. Strengthening alignment between beneficiaries, exacerbators, and contributors—consistent with biosecurity principles—was seen as key to improving both equity and system performance.

At the same time, funding approaches must remain practical, workable, and acceptable across sectors, maintaining engagement while supporting more durable and efficient outcomes.

Participants generally agreed that the Strategy should set clear cost-sharing principles rather than detailed frameworks, recognising that overly prescriptive models risk being inflexible and difficult to apply across diverse contexts. This was seen as particularly important in light of the forthcoming NPMP process, which requires formal, statutory consideration of cost allocation.

Nature-based investment and potential funding opportunities

Participants also identified potential opportunities to supplement traditional funding sources through environmental markets, philanthropic investment, and other nature-based finance mechanisms that support biodiversity and landscape restoration outcomes. There was interest in exploring how emerging voluntary environmental markets and alternative investment approaches might help attract additional resources into long-term wilding conifer management, particularly where interventions deliver multiple public benefits beyond wilding control alone.

Participants noted that wilding conifer management often generates a wide range of outcomes, including protection of indigenous biodiversity, improved freshwater outcomes, landscape restoration, protection of cultural values, and reduced future management costs. There was a view that funding models could better recognise these broader benefits and create stronger incentives for long-term investment in restoration and stewardship activities that deliver enduring environmental and community outcomes.

Discussion also considered the potential role of philanthropic investment, partnerships with charitable foundations, international funding opportunities, and other mechanisms that support nature-positive outcomes. While participants recognised that traditional government investment will continue to play a central role, there was interest in exploring how complementary funding sources could contribute to long-term sustainability, particularly in areas where restoration objectives align with wider environmental, cultural, and community benefits.

More broadly, participants questioned whether future funding approaches could better align the costs generated by land-use activities with the value created through ecological restoration, reflecting a view that restoring indigenous ecosystems and ecological resilience should be regarded as a long-term investment in the health and wellbeing of whenua, communities, and future generations.

Social Licence and Public Engagement

Participants identified low public awareness—particularly in urban populations—as a key challenge, with many people unaware of the issue or confusing wilding conifers with commercial forestry. This creates risks for long-term support, including reduced understanding of programme value and increased vulnerability to opposition around methods such as herbicide use.

Participants emphasised the importance of clearly communicating not only what wilding conifer management actions are being undertaken, but why they are necessary. They stressed that effective communication should highlight both the benefits of intervention and the ecological, cultural, and economic consequences of inaction.

Increasing public awareness of what is at risk, including the loss of indigenous biodiversity, impacts on wai and culturally significant landscapes, and escalating future management costs, was seen as critical for building community ownership of the issue, strengthening public support, and sustaining long-term commitment to wilding conifer management efforts.

Participants noted that awareness alone is unlikely to deliver long-term outcomes. Communication and engagement were seen as important tools for influencing behaviour change across communities, landowners, and industry by increasing understanding of both responsibilities and practical actions that can reduce wilding risk. Supporting people to act, rather than simply informing them, was viewed as an important component of a prevention-focused strategy.

To address these challenges, participants emphasised the need for a strong, coordinated national communications approach that uses clear, relatable messaging to connect the issue to everyday experiences, build understanding, and encourage behaviours that reduce wilding conifer risk.

. A consistent insight was the importance of making success visible and tangible—using visual evidence (e.g. before-and-after imagery) and storytelling to demonstrate both the scale of the problem and the benefits of action.

There was strong support for elevating community and iwi narratives, grounded in place and values, to build trust, relevance, and enduring public support. In addition, participants highlighted practical opportunities to strengthen engagement with the forestry sector through clearer expectations, collaboration, and innovation. These include integrating wilding management into WCIS reporting to improve transparency, profiling and sharing examples of good practice programmes within the sector and aligning management with forest operations such as harvest cycles. There was also a call from forestry sector representatives to support innovation, including gene editing to develop sterile Douglas fir. Exploring a voluntary forestry accord to clarify roles and drive consistent, proactive management of wilding risk across the sector was also raised as a potential opportunity.

9. Additional guidance for the strategy refresh

In relation to the 2014 Strategy, the following guidance was given:

Treaty and cultural considerations must be embedded throughout the Strategy — shaping priorities, decisions, and delivery — rather than being treated as a discrete section or add-on. Noting that in the current strategy they are more or less absent altogether.

Strong foundations to build on are:

- Collaborative, multi-agency model
  - Widely valued partnership approach across government, communities, and stakeholders
  - Strong culture of collaboration and shared responsibility
- Established programme structure and governance
  - Existing national programme, committees, and delivery systems seen as effective and “punching above weight”
- Strong community and grassroots engagement
  - Deep connections with local groups; community ownership and advocacy are major strengths
- Capability, knowledge, and experience base

    - High levels of regional expertise, institutional knowledge, and operational capability
    - Track record of innovation and practical on-the-ground solutions
- Shared understanding of the problem
    - Broad recognition of wilding conifers as an issue and growing public awareness
- Demonstrated success and momentum
    - Proven results to date help maintain credibility and stakeholder support

Aspects inviting reconsideration or fresh thinking are:

- Funding model and cost-sharing approach
    - Need for more stable, long-term funding
    - Reconsider how costs are allocated across beneficiaries and contributors
- Strategic clarity (vision, priorities, values)
    - Vision needs to be clearer, simpler, and more compelling
    - Greater clarity required on what values are being protected and where to prioritise investment
- Science, evidence, and research integration
    - Need for a coordinated research strategy and stronger science leadership
    - Better integration of evidence into decision-making and assumptions
- Regulatory framework and policy settings
    - Strengthen and align national rules and enforcement
    - Address unmanaged seed sources and externalities more effectively
- Programme delivery model and roles
    - Clarify roles and responsibilities across agencies
    - Consider alternative delivery models (e.g., more centralised, or national approaches)
- Prioritisation and investment approach
    - Improve targeting of resources to maximise impact
    - Avoid inefficient or low-strategic-value investments
- Engagement and communication
    - Increase public awareness and social licence
    - Improve messaging (including terminology and framing of the issue)
- Sector integration and partnerships
    - Stronger engagement with forestry and other sectors
    - Better coordination of effort, data, and resources across stakeholders