PREDATOR FREE CHATHAMS SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Nick Taylor and Associates

Authors:

Katherine Russell

Nick Taylor

Citation:

Russell KJ, Taylor CN (2026). Predator Free Chathams Social Impact Assessment. Nick Taylor & Associates, Christchurch. Prepared for the Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust.

Contents

Glossary – Abbreviations

CIC - Chatham Islands Council

CHART - Chathams Islands Heritage and Restoration Trust

CIET – Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust

CILRT - Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust

DOC – Department of Conservation

ECAN – Environment Canterbury

ETS – Emissions Trading Scheme

HMT – Hokotehi Moriori Trust

NMW – Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri

IOCC - The Island-Ocean Connection Challenge

KMP – A family-owned plant nursery on Chatham Island

MPI – Ministry of Primary Industries

MIST – Moriori Imi Settlement Trust

NZ – New Zealand

NZETS – New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme

NZTA – New Zealand Transport Agency

PFC – Predator Free Chatham Islands

PFNZ – Predator Free New Zealand 2050

RTO - Regional Tourism Organisation

SCION – a group of the New Zealand Institute for Bioeconomy Science

SIA - Social impact assessment

TACC – Total allowable commercial catch

ZIP - Zero Invasive Predators

Executive Summary

The Chatham Islands is an island group lying 800 km to the east of New Zealand's South Island and is home to around 600 people. Most of the population is on Rēkohu / Wharekauri / Chatham Island (here after Chatham Island or the main island; 71,947 ha) with a small population of around 35 on Rangihaute / Rangiāuria / Pitt Island (here after Pitt Island; 6300 ha). There are several smaller offshore islands and rock stacks. The Chathams is host to species endemic to the Chathams and to Aotearoa New Zealand species now found only on the Chathams. Many of these are in danger, with 10% of New Zealand's threatened or at-risk species resident in the Chathams (CILRT 2025). Chatham Island has three species of rats (*Rattus* spp.), possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*), feral cats (*Felis catus*), and mice (*Mus musculus*). Feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*) are also a problem. Pitt Island has feral cats and mice but is free of rats, and both islands are free of mustelids.

Chatham Islands landscape. Photo by: Jess Mackenzie, CILRT

Eradicating predators from islands is well established as the preferred approach to protect island species. New Zealand is well advanced in methods and techniques to achieve eradication of mice, rats, possums and feral cats on uninhabited islands. However, eradication on inhabited islands presents new challenges and requires thorough social engagement and planning as part of suppression and eradication projects. Social impact assessment (SIA) is a process used in the planning and design of projects, policies and plans. In this SIA, we look at the community views of a Predator Free Chathams (PFC), the leadership of the Chathams Islands Landscape Restoration Trust (CILRT) and how a PFC could impact individuals and the wider community.

Ecological and social issues need to be considered side by side in the planning and design of predator eradication projects. As such this SIA has presented the ecological and social baseline for the Chathams in 2025. The CILRT is leading the PFC project which aims to eradicate rats, possums and feral cats from the main island and feral cats from Pitt Island in a staged approach. Work is underway with trapping of predators in the northeast area (refer Figure 2). The ecological baseline outlines the existing conservation projects in the Chathams by the CILRT and other trusts and individuals across the islands. Biosecurity and lessons from other islands such as Lord Howe Island in Australia are discussed for the lessons they provide.

Socially, island communities are unique, while at the same time they have common issues such as transport links, housing and economic viability. The key industries in the Chathams are fishing, farming and tourism. Fishing is in decline and farming has challenges, including significant issues due to the shipping service including being suspended for months due to ship repairs. Tourism peaked in 2021 from domestic travel when the New Zealand borders were closed to international travel due to Covid-19 and has reduced since. This peak effectively tested the islands for higher levels of tourism, domestic and international.

In recent years, programmes like Jobs for Nature and One Billion Trees have shown that there are economic opportunities in conservation. In the last two years carbon farming through various mechanisms has commenced on the Chathams with several landowners vesting land for carbon sequestration with some high returns forecast but not yet realised.

Challenges include a lack of housing supply, shipping and transport reliability, power, fuel and food costs, and a declining population resulting in less social cohesion. Key organisations including the Chatham Islands Council (CIC), Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust (CIET), Hokotehi Moriori Trust (HMT) and Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri (NMW) have recently demonstrated cohesive planning for the future of the Chathams.

Fieldwork for this SIA included two weeks in the Chathams undertaking interviews and observations, building on desktop baseline work and zoom interviews. In total 56 people were interviewed. One major limitation of this report is that we were unable to travel to Pitt Island to talk to the Pitt community due to various transport and timing constraints.

We found widespread support for CILRT and for CILRT leading work on PFC. There was support for removal of rats, possums and feral cats. Many people raised the issue of feral pig management, but not eradication, due to their recreational use for hunting. Weka were recognised as having an effect on vulnerable wildlife, but they are part of the social and cultural fabric of the Chathams as an island symbol, food source, and for recreation. The key concern for most people was the cost and feasibility of eradication projects and what methods would be used in such a project. There was support for the northeast as the feasible place to undertake phase one elimination but also a recognition of the significant amount of conservation work occurring across the islands and a need to reflect that in the wider project. Chatham Islanders understand biosecurity, but it was clear that biosecurity needed to be strengthened to stop new pests arriving on the islands, to stop pests currently absent from Pitt Island from reaching Pitt, and strengthening biosecurity in advance of planned eradication work. There was widespread support for the funded domestic cat desexing project.

There is an opportunity for the PFC project to be designed in a way that provides positive economic and social impacts to the Chathams community through a stronger conservation economy. There are economic opportunities through employment in conservation in a flexible manner that suits the multiple, part-time employment nature of work in the Chathams. Employment that can be flexible to fishing and farming work, which is very weather dependent, can provide locals with additional income streams. Where experts are required, ensuring that local businesses are used to provide housing and services will provide additional benefits to the community. Supporting off-island workers employed on the Chathams to bring a partner and / or family with them provides long term social benefits to the community through boosting social cohesion, school rolls, and positive community development.

Conservation is a key focus of tourism on the island and eradicating pests from an area such as the northeast or Pitt Island will make the island more attractive to ecotourists and provide demonstrable downstream economic opportunities for the community. However, there can also be negative social impacts from tourism such as overcrowding. The Covid-19 tourism peak gave an opportunity to test this limit and there was agreement that a small increase of tourism over current levels was unlikely to be detrimental to the island although there were some capacity issues and infrastructure requirements that need careful management. Tourism also provides an opportunity to leverage donations and concession fees to fund CILRT and the PFC work.

We recommend, in short:

- CILRT continue to lead PFC work with technical support from key agencies such as DOC
- CILRT need to develop long-term sustainable funding to secure their work and enable an expansion of the project team
- CILRT should prioritise the northeast phase and Pitt Island, and consider developing a comprehensive programme of conservation work in the Chathams and a central showcase project to build engagement in PFC
- CILRT should develop community champions for PFC
- CILRT should look to how it can be a dynamic and flexible employer / contractor to provide maximum economic and social benefit to the local community.

Acknowledgements

This report is possible due to the time and knowledge contributed by many Chatham Islanders who met and discussed their islands with us, joined meetings and met us in their homes, businesses or on their land.

We thank CILRT for their welcome on the Chathams and support with fieldwork, particularly Hamish Tuanui-Chisholm and Mike Bell.

We acknowledge James Russell and his advocacy to ensure this SIA was funded, and his conservation and ecological input into this SIA.

We acknowledge the Taylor and Russell whanau for supporting this SIA and fieldwork period.

Section A: Introduction and background

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the SIA

Lying over 800 km east of Christchurch, New Zealand, the Chatham Islands / Rēkohu (hereafter Chathams)[1] comprise two larger inhabited islands, Rēkohu / Wharekauri / Chatham Island (here after Chatham Island or the main island; 71,947 ha) and Rangihaute / Rangiāuria / Pitt Island (here after Pitt Island; 6300 ha), and several smaller uninhabited islands and rock stacks (see Figure 1). On the main island there are several settlements including Waitangi, Te One, Port Hutt, Owenga and Kaingaroa with a total population of around 600 people. A smaller number, around 35 people, live on Pitt Island[2]. The islands are 45 minutes ahead of NZ Standard Time.

Like many islands around the world the Chathams have unique and at-risk native flora and fauna, including 10% of New Zealand's threatened or at-risk species (CILRT 2025) making the Chathams a world hot spot for biodiversity restoration (Sanson 2025). A considerable challenge for restoration of island ecology and landscapes is introduced mammalian predators (here after 'predators'). On the Chathams, these include possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*), feral cats (*Felis catus*), and three species of rats (*Rattus* spp.). The islands are free of mustelids but do have mice (*Mus musculus*) along with feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*), feral cattle (*Bos taurus*) and feral emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*).

Community rat trapping. Photo by: CILRT

Eradication of predators is a recognised method of protecting remaining native wildlife on islands and is a pathway to restoring species through natural recovery and interventions such as translocation. In New Zealand, methods of mammal eradication on uninhabited islands are well established and successful. Scaling up and adapting predator free strategies from uninhabited offshore islands to larger, inhabited islands remains a key challenge (Russell & Taylor 2019). As island populations are usually smaller than mainland populations, they require a specific shift in thinking from treating predator control as a largely ecological problem to as a complex social-ecological problem (Peltzer et al. 2019; Taylor et al. 2020). Furthermore, when finding solutions to the complex interactions that characterise biodiversity conservation issues, experience shows it is important to include indigenous knowledge systems (Nelson & Reed 2023).

[1]Throughout the report the order of languages is Moriori / Māori / English. For places, all names will be given for first use and the name used throughout the report identified.

[2] www.tepapa.govt.nz/discover-collections/read-watch-play/rekohu-chatham-islands

Social impact assessment (SIA) is a process for planning and design of projects, strategies, plans and policies. SIA involves working with communities, indigenous groups and stakeholders to consider the human impacts, positive and negative, of proposals and how positive impacts can be maximised and negative impacts avoided, remedied or mitigated (Russell et al. 2018).

Predator Free Chathams (PFC) is a programme established to remove predators (possums, rats, feral cats) from the main Chatham Island and feral cats from Pitt Island. The Chatham Island Landscape Restoration Trust (CILRT) is leading PFC work on the main island, working with Hokotehi Moriori Trust (HMT) and Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri (NMW), with the goal to have the Chatham Islands teeming with life by 2050 (CILRT 2025; Sanson 2025). Alongside predator removal, CILRT recognises the importance of habitat restoration, including the translocation of native species, and works with other community partners and landowners on these projects. In addition to work on Chatham Island, there are investigations to remove feral cats from Pitt Island, following on from recent efforts at controlling these predators.

This SIA, commissioned by Predator Free 2050 Ltd for CILRT, includes desktop research and fieldwork to understand the social impacts of the predator removal proposals in the Chathams. The key objectives are to understand the aspirations and concerns of the community, how the projects will affect the community, and to make recommendations around next steps to further the predator free projects.

1.2 Uses of this SIA report

This report outlines the approach to the SIA, the data used, and fieldwork conducted in September 2025. There is a description of the baseline including the geography and biodiversity of the islands as well as social features such as population demographics, the economy and community structures. Following, a discussion of key issues and impacts for PFC we suggest a strategic pathway to support a successful project emphasising ways to work with the local community. This final section includes recommendations and a short conclusion. Uses of this SIA report

This report has several uses and audiences in mind. The report helps to provide feedback to the community about the social issues and impacts of PFC. Importantly, they can see the achievements and benefits to date and the great potential ahead. It can help to socialise existing and potential partners about the Chathams community, development issues on the islands and the importance of a community-based approach to development projects. It can help those working on technical and ecological aspects to see PFC as a social-ecological problem and:

- help to develop the social licence for PFC on and off the islands
- report progress to date to key stakeholders and the wider public
- establish a social baseline for future evaluations of PFC
- assist in development of implementation plans for PFC
- assist in funding proposals and grant applications.

2 Approach to the SIA

2.1 Community-based approach

SIA is a process that assists decision makers, affected people and communities to plan for and manage the impacts of a programme of work, as is now underway with PFC. Using a community-based approach, SIA provides a way for individuals, groups and organisations to participate from early on in forming plans and making decisions around a project or plan (Taylor & Mackay 2022). A community-based approach driven by fresh island leadership is recognised as essential to the restoration of Chathams habitats (Sanson 2025).

There are important elements to a community-based approach. These include flexibility to build a programme from an initial strategy and steps that build governance, capacity of people and skills, and the co-production of knowledge. In this instance it is important to assess what has happened so far and consider ways that the programme can be enhanced to further achieve positive social outcomes for the islands.

2.2 Determinates of wellbeing for the Chathams

The community impacts of the PFC project have positive and negative outcomes for social wellbeing. To assess these social impacts on community wellbeing, we adapted a wellbeing framework from the list of community outcomes developed by the Chatham Islands Council (CIC) as part of its long-term planning[3]: These outcomes are:

A resilient community – a sense of belonging, with access to information and active participation in community life. A community prepared to plan for and respond to a range of challenges and recover from natural disasters.

A culturally enriched community – strong values support the Islanders' unique way of life, traditions, and unique social and cultural identity, while embracing diversity, heritage and miheke/taonga, recognising culturally significant matters and all voices in the community.

A safe and healthy community – with access to affordable transport, quality housing, health and emergency services, education for all ages, sport and recreation, a high standard of living and strong social support.

A vibrant and prosperous economy - the economy is supported by appropriate and affordable infrastructure in transport, energy and telecommunications that protects people, physical assets and the natural environment. Growth of a skilled workforce, and opportunities for everyone to contribute to and benefit from a range of livelihoods across fishing, farming and tourism industries.

An environmentally conscious and sustainable community - that protects, sustains and enriches the environment for future generations, values the Chathams' cultural heritage and its unique ecosystems, landscapes and indigenous biodiversity, exercising t'chiekitanga/kaitiakitanga/stewardship. The quality of freshwater and coastal water is protected and improved, waste is minimised and living and working environments contribute to healthy communities.

[3] https://www.cic.govt.nz/your-council/community-outcomes

2.3 SIA project cycle

A typical approach to an SIA is to divide the work into phases – scoping, developing the baseline, assessing options, confirming the plan, monitoring and mitigation of impacts, and evaluation of outcomes (Taylor & Mackay 2022). For this SIA, scoping and developing the baseline tasks were undertaken from March to August 2025. These included reviewing data, reports, background information, and meetings with project partners to develop the baseline – current status – of the ecological and social issues relating to a predator free Chathams. For further detail on the project cycle and work undertaken for this SIA please see Appendix 1.

Fieldwork consisted of two weeks in the Chathams in September 2025, supported by online interviews both before and after the trip. A total of 56 people were interviewed either individually (in-person or via zoom), in small groups, or at community days, and informal conversations were held with at least 10 further people (e.g. at shops, on walks, at the medical centre) – see Table 1 for broad stakeholder groups. Two community days were held – one in Kaingaroa and one in Waitangi. Researchers also attended Densday – a popular community gathering with information displays and an opportunity to talk to the team then or later. A feature of this small community is that many people were talked to more than once and in different contexts.

Full details of data availability and fieldwork constraints are listed in Appendix 1, however, there were two key fieldwork issues that have affected the work. The first was it became logistically impossible to get to Pitt Island as the first week of the fieldwork trip overlapped the Pitt Island School Weka Walk, meaning the majority of the community were off-island, and the weather in the second week was not conducive to travelling to Pitt apart from one day – on which no pilots were available to fly the Pitt Island plane. The second was a gastroenteritis virus spreading rapidly in the community in the second week of the trip following an event at Te One School. This meant some interviews had to be cancelled. To mitigate these issues, further online interviews were undertaken and two drop-in sessions on zoom were offered to the Pitt Island community, although unfortunately no one attended.

Table 1: Key stakeholders identified for Predator Free Chathams

Broad stakeholder types	Key organisations	Other interested groups
Government / management	CIC, CIET, DOC, MPI	
Tourism	Tourism Chatham Islands	Accommodation and hospitality providers, tour providers, museum, Industry participants
Transport	CIET/ Airport company, Port company, Shipping company, Air Chathams	Businesses, residents, visitors
Imi, Iwi	HMT, MIST, NMW	
Conservation	CILRT, DOC	Taiko Trust, CHART, CI Conservation Board, covenant holders
Schools	Te One, Kaingaroa, Pitt Island schools, Kohanga Reo	Principals & teachers, families, primary and high school students
Health and other social services	Chatham Islands Health Centre, Community and Public Health Canterbury	Community Focus, Heartlands, Densdays
Economy	Farmers, fishing industry, forestry and carbon farming industry	Fishing industry groups, CI Farmers Association

Section B: Ecological and social baseline

3 Ecological baseline

3.1 Geography

Chatham Island (44° 00'S. 176° 30'W; Harper 2022) comprises 71,947 ha of land along with 6300 ha on Pitt Island (Figure 1). On these two islands there are several DOC reserves including one nature reserve, seven scenic reserves, one national historic reserve, two historic reserves and four conservation areas. A permit is required to enter the nature reserve at Tuku. There is a growing amount of land in private ownership but protected for conservation, primarily through covenants[4]. There are two significant offshore islands managed by DOC – Maung 'Re / Mangere and Hokorereoro / Rangatira / South East Island – both protected, free of introduced mammals and classed as nature reserves[5]. There are additional important smaller islands and rock stacks that make up the Chathams group with a total 31 named islands, reefs and stacks.

Black Robin South East Island. Photo by: Dave Boyle

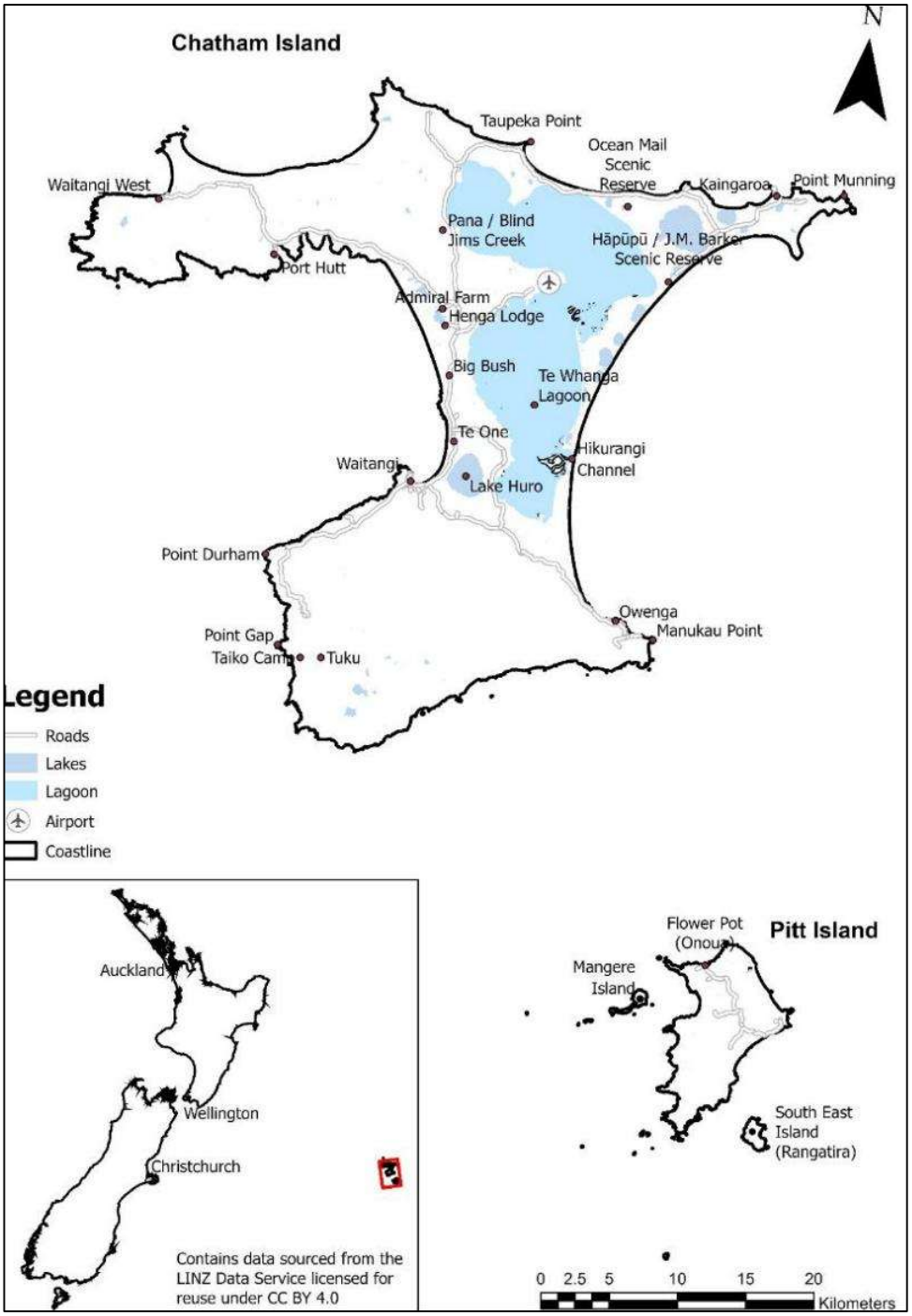
The Chathams have a diverse geography and numerous habitats, all strongly influenced by topography and the oceanic environment (DOC 2018). Habitats are strongly influenced by the climate with southwest winds that are often strong to gale force (Atkinson 1996) and include farmland, remnant and regenerating bush, wetlands, and lakes. Chatham Island also has a large inland lagoon (Te Whanga) with a small opening to the ocean on the eastern side.

Chatham Island originally had a vegetation cover that included a mosaic of swamp forest, coastal forest, scrub lands and peat (Barker 1984). Today the vegetation cover and associated fauna is described as depauperate yet home to 10% of New Zealand's threatened or at-risk species (CILRT 2025). Across the Chathams, there are approximately 326 species threatened or at risk, some endemic to the Chathams (CILRT 2023). Pitt Island is described as thickly wooded or covered in bush in early pakeha recollections (Lawrie & Powell 2017) but today consists of mostly open pastoral land with small bush areas.

Surrounded by rich marine resources the Chathams historically hosted a very large seabird population with intricate linkages to island ecology. Today local people talk about this natural "marine" environment that they observe in their daily lives fishing and farming. They note that there is a direct link between a rich and healthy seabird population, their breeding areas and the nutrients they bring from sea to land and vegetation.

[4] https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/offshore-islands/chatham-islands/
[5] https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/offshore-islands/chatham-islands/

Figure 1: Chatham Islands



3.2 Biodiversity

Fauna on the group include a number of endemic birds such as the karure/kakaruia/Chatham Island black robin (*Petroica traversi*), pārēā / parea / Chatham Island pigeon (*Hemiphaga chathamensis*), Forbes' parakeet (*Cyanoramphus forbesi*), tchiak/ tāiko Petrel (*Pterodroma magentae*) or native birds once found across New Zealand and now restricted to the Chathams such as the tchūriwat'/tūturuatu/shore plover (*Thinornis novaeseelandiae*), and other endemic

species such as the Chatham Island mudfish (*Neochanna rekohua* found only in freshwater lakes and streams of southern Chatham Island[6]. Many of these species are threatened and at risk of extinction, often due to predation and/or habitat loss, e.g. scurvy grass (*Lepidium rekohuense*) found recently and close to extinction. Similar to many islands around the world, the introduction of predators to places not evolved to mammalian threats has been devastating. Since human arrival 21 bird species, about a third of the total, have gone extinct (Aikman & Miskelly 2004).

Chatham and Pitt Islands have some, but not all, the main predators found in New Zealand[7] including possums, feral cats, and rats. All three are found on Chatham Island but Pitt Island only has feral cats. Rats and cats are widely known to negatively affect native birds in New Zealand and Harper (2022) noted that the loss of Chatham Island kōkō / tūī and tomtit from the main island as possums spread following their introduction in 1911 demonstrates possums too have been a significant negative factor in the survival of native birds. Mice are found on both islands.

There are also populations of feral cattle, sheep (*Ovis aries*), pigs, goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*), hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus)* and emu on Chatham Island and feral pigs on Pitt Island, causing damage to habitat. Some of these populations, such as pigs and cattle, are causing widespread damage while others are more localised, such as emu around Lake Horo. In addition, Jane (1989) mentions wild sheep and cattle and weka (*Gallirallus australis hectori*[8]) as threats to native species. The New Zealand weka was introduced to Chatham Island in 1905 and Pitt Island in the 1970s. The weka now takes on an iconic role representing born Chatham Islanders who call themselves weka not kiwi, although due to the later introduction to Pitt Island they are viewed slightly differently by Pitt Islanders. At the same time local people tell of the damage weka cause to birdlife and vegetation.

Atkinson (1997) identifies the spread of terrestrial weed species as a problem on inhabited outlying islands such as the Chathams, due to their long period of human occupation and frequent visits by people. Weeds on the Chathams are spread by people, birds and pests such as pigs and are a threat to restoration efforts. In 2024 Environment Canterbury (ECAN) supported work to control several weeds on Chatham Island including banana passionfruit (*Passiflora tripartita*), old-man's beard (*Clematis vitalba*), Chilean guava (*Ugni molinae*) and ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgari*). ECAN and the CIC have active programmes to identify and remove these woody weeds as well as to control their reinvasion from New Zealand, such as with potting mixes, equipment or as garden plants[9]. ECAN notes invasive marine weeds are also important threats, such as Caulerpa (*C. brachypus* and *C. parvifolia*) Undaria (*U. pinnatifida*) and Mediterranean fanworm (*Sabella spallanzanii*). These species can arrive with vessels and marine equipment and spread rapidly to smother native marine life.

3.3 Predator Free Chatham Islands

Predator Free Chathams (PFC) is part of a restoration plan for the islands focusing on removing possums, rats and feral cats from Chatham Island and feral cats from Pitt Island. It is a key

[6] https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/freshwater-fish/mudfish/chatham-island-mudfish/
[7] Here and in following sections, the use of New Zealand reflects how it is used in the Chathams to refer to the rest of New Zealand – the North, South, and surrounding islands.
[8] In New Zealand we recognise four sub species including the buff weka, common in the Chathams and rare in the South Island
[9] *www.cic.govt.nz/your-council/news-and-events/2024/hard-work-in-pest-control-over-the-last-year*

action in the Chatham Islands Investment Strategy; Outcome 3; Action 3: Develop and implement habitat restoration and protection and PF Chathams 2050 (Kāhui Manu Tāiko 2024).

To achieve their goal of restoring the islands to be teaming with life, CILRT has identified four broad categories of actions:

1. pest control and predator eradication
2. restoring and protecting habitats and ecosystems
3. bringing conservation and nature into all facets of our islands' community
4. collaborating with and empowering others (CILRT 2023).

CILRT has also outlined eight outcomes with actions and measures of success in their strategy (CILRT 2023) and predator removal is a fundamental part of many of the outcomes, as removing predators is the key foundation to enabling habitat restoration and then species translocation. The CILRT also works closely with HMT, NMW, the CIC, and the wider community (CILRT 2023). As at September 2025, there were six Trustees, a project lead, a communications lead, and a treasurer[10]. The Trust is funded by donations and grants, currently with no long-term secure funding. The project has been accepted by the Island-Ocean Connection Challenge (IOCC)[11], which may enable international donations and funding.

To remove predators from Chatham Island, an initial feasibility study split the island into three areas with the northeast of the island, indicated in yellow in Figure 2 identified as the first area to undertake predator control. Later stages would cover the northwest and southern areas. On Pitt Island, the goal is to eradicate feral cats.

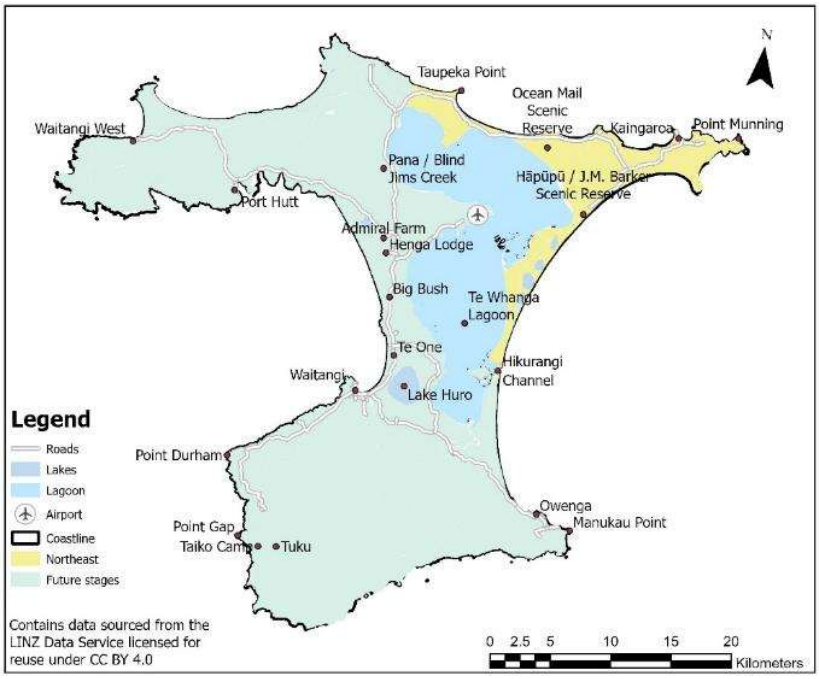
3.3.1 Northeast Phase

The northeast area covers about 10% of Chatham Island, 7500 ha, and includes Kaingaroa village. Eradicating possums from this area would be the largest possum eradication worldwide and the largest feral cat eradication in Aotearoa New Zealand (Harper 2022). In 2022, Harper (2022) reviewed the options for a proposed Stage 1 including do nothing, various suppression methods, and eradication. He concluded that eradication is the most cost-effective long-term option with the most positive biodiversity impacts (Harper 2022). The species considered in scope included feral cats, rats and possums. However, a single multi-species operation as proposed by Harper is not currently funded.

Today, the northeast area has two major trapping projects underway. CILRT has commenced rat and possum trapping with 140 AT220 traps in the network as at August 2025[12] and 295 traps by March 2026, with the goal of 450. Currently, CILRT is using AT220 traps at a 500 m grid spacing and would like to get funding to reduce this spacing, to get a sufficient reduction in the rat population. AT220 traps are self-resetting traps and are designed for ship rats and possums but also kill other rodents including mice. They can be monitored remotely and need maintenance quarterly.

[10] www.chathamrestorationtrust.org.nz/about-us/our-team
[11] https://www.jointheiocc.org/iocc-projects/chatham-islands-new-zealand
[12] www.chathamrestorationtrust.org.nz/predator-free/trap-network

Figure 2: Phases for predator elimination



In addition to the CILRT trap network, HMT has employed a ranger who is undertaking possum and cat suppression on their farmland (including bait stations and live cat trapping), which covers a substantial proportion (approx. 90%; CILRT, pers. comm) of the northeast area. Private landowners are also undertaking various pest control actions on their properties e.g. using rat traps and bait at home.

CILRT has gained funding to undertake a more detailed next step implementation plan for the northeast area that includes more detail on trap spacing, methods (e.g. introducing ground-based poison), options for eradicating cats and possums, and the creation of buffer exclusions zones in the south and northwest of the area (Restoring Rēkohu – an Implementation Plan for eradicating possums and feral cates from Northeast Rēkohu). The goal of this phase of the project is elimination in the northeast area and planning for future phases.

3.3.2 Pitt Island

Removing feral cats from Pitt Island would be the largest feral cat eradication in New Zealand. The project requires further operational planning and community buy-in especially the permission to access private land.

The Pitt Island Species and Habitat Protection project received NZ$640,000 through Jobs for Nature funding[13]. This funded a 3-year project run by the CIC including hiring up to six local residents as part-time contractors to undertake live-cage cat trapping on Pitt Island, which has reduced the feral cat population. The project wound up in June 2024, but over 3 years it achieved a major reduction in the feral cat population on Pitt Island with some estimates suggesting up to 90% of feral cats were removed (unpubl. data). However, funding has since finished meaning there is no ongoing control of feral cats. In the last year the feral cat

[13] https://www.jobsfornature.govt.nz/funded-projects/

population will have grown again substantially. This outcome demonstrates the risks to sustained suppression projects with finite funding compared to eradication.

A significant reserve on Pitt Island is the Ellen Elizabeth Preece Conservation Covenant, commonly known as Caravan Bush. Established in 1998 with over 53 ha, 36 ha were fenced in 2001 with a predator proof fence (Lawrie & Powell 2017). This fence has provided sanctuary to local birds and enabled translocations. In late 2025 work the replacement predator proof fence at Caravan Bush on Pitt Island commenced and completion is due in 2026. The new fence is designed to be cat proof and will have the narrowest gauge possible in the hope it will be mouse proof as well.

3.4 Other conservation work

Other projects across the Chathams include work by DOC, CIC, individuals, trusts, schools and community groups. All these projects contribute to the long-term preservation and restoration of the Chathams and provide pockets of protected area and habitats for native wildlife.

DOC manages 15 reserves on Chatham and Pitt Islands, either directly or via contract, with a focus to both protect and restore natural ecosystems including through stock fencing and predator management[14]. Reserves include Hapupu, Ocean Mail, Nikau and Henga (see Figure 3).

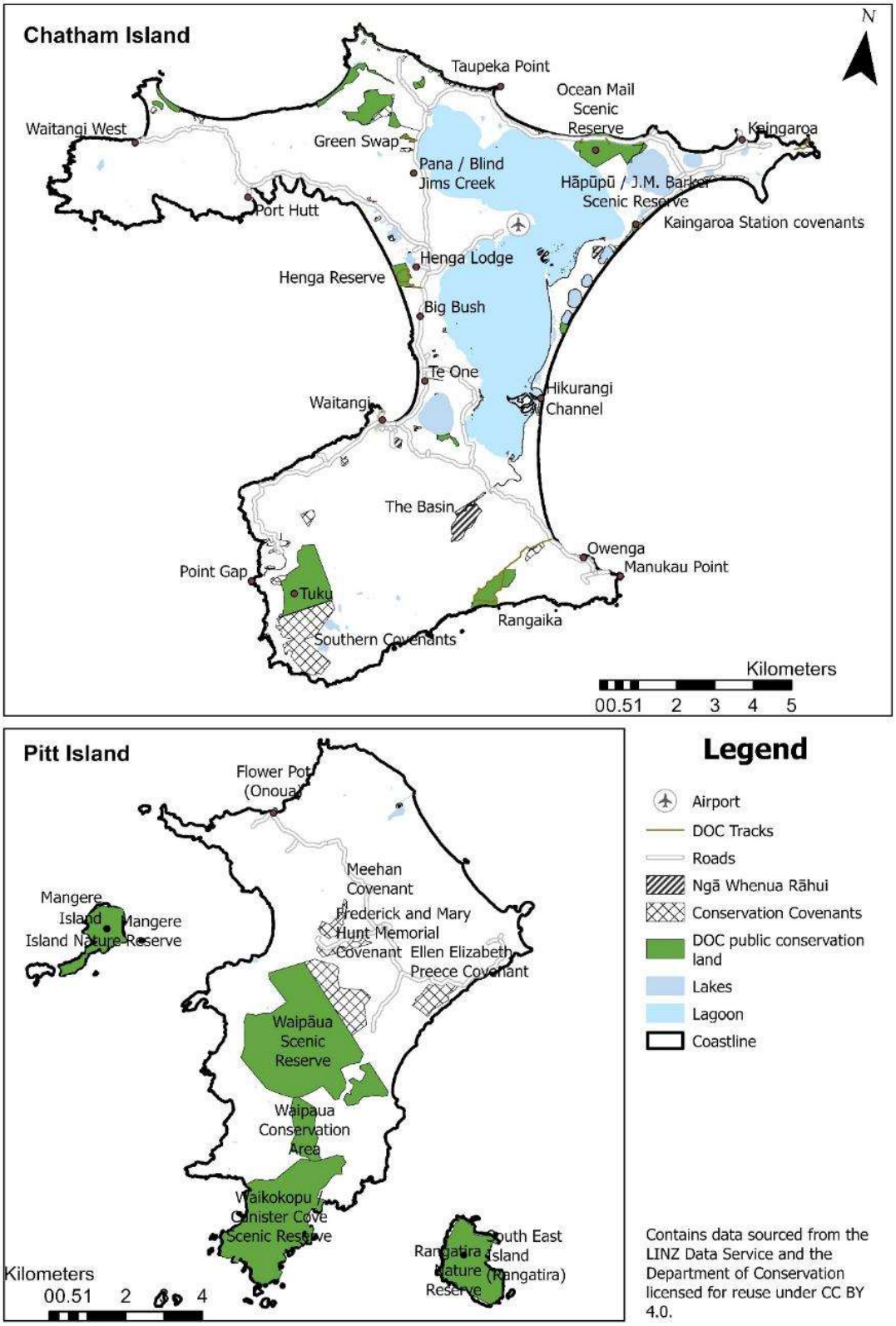
The Chathams also has a high number of protected areas on private land that are protected through covenants (see Figure 3). Miskelly (2008) acknowledges the many gifts of land and reserve contributions on Chatham and Pitt Islands estimating around 40 agreements to protect land approximating 3,000 ha as well as private land holdings that are fenced, protected or restored in some way but without formal protection. Many also involve privately run pest control efforts. A more recent change in the Chathams is the introduction of carbon farming, which is covered in more detail below. The introduction of carbon farming will likely result in further land being protected for forest regeneration.

In New Zealand, the main ways to set up a conservation covenant are with the Department of Conservation or council, with the QEII Trust (open space covenant or kawenata for Māori landowners), or a Ngā Whenua Rāhui between the Minister of Conservation and Māori landowners[15]. The QEII Trust does not operate in the Chathams, therefore the primary method of protection and accessing funding for covenants in the Chathams is via DOC including Ngā Whenua Rāhui. Each piece of covenanted land is different, but usually has stock-exclusion, planting, and weed and animal pest control as part of their management plans.

The CIC has staff members working on ecological issues (CIC 2025) and encourages individuals to undertake invasive weed identification and control, and predator control. Individuals also undertake private conservation work on their land and, with support from the CILRT, households can also access rat traps for their private property[16].

[14] https://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/chatham-islands/
[15] https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/content/dam/ac/docs/environment/voluntary-protection-natural-areas-private-land.pdf
[16] https://www.cic.govt.nz/your-council/news-and-events/2022/keeping-your-homes-rat-free

Figure 3: Public conservation land, conservation and Ngā Whenua Rāhui covenants (based on publicly available data November 2025)



There are several larger conservation projects and trusts in the Chathams. The Chathams Heritage and Restoration Trust (CHART) was launched in 2008 with the goal of protecting and restoring the native habit and wildlife of the Chathams while controlling pests and predators.[17] One of the major projects CHART has is Blind Jims. Here they have secured access and leases for the land, undertaken predator and weed control and habitat restoration through planting and provided tourism facilities including a track, signage, and toilets.

Along the southwest coast, habitat restoration, predator control and translocation of birds has been occurring for decades, with clear results. In 1983, the land for the Tuku Nature Reserve was gifted by Manuel and Evelyn Tuanui (Lawrie & Powell 2017). Today this reserve is owned by DOC and managed under contract, with significant predator control and support for the taiko. The Taiko Trust is contracted by DOC to protect the taiko, and in 2006 2.4 ha was fenced with a predator proof fence to provide further protection of taiko chicks[18]. Nearby the Tuanui Family Trust received funding in 2017 to build a 1.7 km predator proof fence at Point Gap, creating the 40 ha Gap Sanctuary. Albatross translocation has been trialled here along with other seabird conservation projects with varying success[19]. Bruce and Liz Tuanui have undertaken a significant amount of further habitation restoration projects on their land over many years, including in the Awatotara (Manuel and Evelyn Tuanui Family Covenant). Along with habitat restoration and predator control their work has enabled natural increases in birdlife, and translocations. For example, following the disappearance of kōkō / tūī in the 1990s translocations to Awatotara occurred in 2009 and 2010 (Lawrie & Powell 2017). The southwest area is also well known for pārēā / parea, whose population has responded successfully to conservation work from around 150 individuals in 1995, to over 200 in 2005 and over 500 in recent years (Lawrie & Powell 2017). There is work underway to do further pārēā / parea population counts.

At Manukau Point in the southeast, Maui and Susan Soloman have 150 ha in kawenata created in 2006 which they are restoring under their project Hokinga Mai Kā Manu. Funding from Ngā Whenua Rāhui and One Billion Trees has supported stock fencing, a nursery, planting and pest control[20].

Finally private landowners are undertaking conservation actions, both within larger areas of bush such as Big Bush where landowners are protecting and restoring the bush through stock exclusion, planting and predator control, and by many smaller scale activities. These private conservation activities include predator control through trapping, poisoning, sonic predator control devices and other methods, as well as planting, restoration and protection of native habitat on their individual land. The landowners undertaking conservation projects on their land and the amount of land being restored as part of conservation projects are part of the growing conservation movement on the islands.

3.5 Biosecurity

Biosecurity for the Chathams is critical to preventing the spread of further unwanted organisms and to protect the Chathams during and after a Predator Free Chathams project. Biosecurity within the Chathams is also critical as not all species on the main island are found on other islands in the group, for example Pitt Island has never been invaded by rats (CIC 2021a). Key

[17] https://gg.govt.nz/publications/chatham-islands-heritage-and-restoration-trust-launch
[18] https://www.taiko.org.nz/projects/sweetwater
[19] https://www.taiko.org.nz/
[20] https://predatorfreenz.org/stories/restoring-nature-and-relationships-on-rekohu-chatham-islands

pathways into the islands include ballast water, the port, airport, fishing vessels, and natural spread (CIC 2021b). Within the Chathams, the Pitt Island port and airport are pathways to Pitt, and boats and fishing vessels are the primary pathway to other islands.

Under the Biosecurity Act 1993 regional councils are to provide leadership to prevent, reduce, or eliminate pests in their region[21]. CIC currently contract some regional council responsibilities, including biosecurity, to ECAN. ECAN contract SBS Biota to undertake pest management, for example checking freight before departing New Zealand[22]. DOC undertakes biosecurity checks for those travelling to Mangere and South East Island.

The Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) has national responsibility for biosecurity and along with protecting the international border, its second focus is to eradicate or manage the impact of pests already in the country[23]. If a pest is detected, then MPI take a leadership role in determining what is to be done (CIC 2021a).

Given the importance of biosecurity to the CILRT's work, CILRT hosted a biosecurity hui in late 2024[24]. The workshop looked at the pathways, risks, threats (such as unwanted organisms) and identified some next steps to advance biosecurity in the Chathams (unpubl. data).

3.6 Lessons from other projects

Inhabitation on islands poses additional challenges for scaling up the eradication of invasive mammalian species (Russell et al. 2025) and for the practice of impact assessment. Internationally, experts have been grappling with how to undertake eradications on inhabited islands. While many islands with small populations have had eradications undertaken these are often private islands or small outposts with only government staff. For the purposes of this report, we adopt Russell et al. (2018)'s definition of an inhabited island as one that includes the basic infrastructure of a community such as schools, churches, community buildings, and opportunities for economic livelihoods in the private and public sector. Selected inhabited islands that have had eradications completed, planned or investigated (DSIE 2019) are outlined in Table 2.

Rattus norvegicus (Norway/Brown rat). Source: James Russell.

[21] https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1993/0095/latest/DLM4757510.html
[22] https://spsbiota.co.nz/pages/chatham-islands-biosecurity-quarantine
[23] https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/about-biosecurity-in-new-zealand/mpis-role-in-biosecurity
[24] https://www.chathamrestorationtrust.org.nz/resources/blog-and-news/biosecurity/

Table 2: Inhabited Island projects (selected)

Island	Country	Pop.	Size	Eradication target	Status
Rakiura	New Zealand	380	174 600 ha	rats, possums, feral cats and hedgehogs	Landscape suppression
Aotea / Great Barrier Island	New Zealand	940	28,695 ha	Feral cats, rats	Phased landscaped elimination
Lord Howe	Australia	350	1,455 ha	Rats and mice, aerial and ground based	Completed, successful.
Ventotene	Italy	690	135.8 ha	Black rat via ground-based bait with approx. 4% aerial baiting	Completed, successful
St Agnes and Gugh, Isles of Scilly	England	85	148 ha	Norway Rats, ground-based bait stations	Completed, successful
Christmas Island	Australia	1600	35,000 ha	Feral cats	Eradication ongoing
Floreana Island	Galapagos, Ecuador	150	17,300 ha	Feral goats; cats, rodents, toxin including delivered by drone	Goat successful; cats, rodents underway
Ascencion Island	United Kingdom Overseas Territory of St Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha	800	9,700 ha	Feral cats; poison baiting, live trapping, and opportunistic shooting	Completed, successful

3.6.1 Key lessons from rat eradication projects

Key issues for rat eradication projects, and lessons learnt, are taken from the successful rat eradications on St Agnes and Gugh (Bell 2019), Langara, British Columbia[25] (Kaiser et al. 1997), Lord Howe (Walsh et al. 2019; Lord Howe Island Board 2025) and Venotene (Capizzi et al. 2024), as well as the work on planning eradications and community engagement on Rakiura (Russell et al. 2017), Aotea (Russell et al. 2018; Parkes 2022; Tū Mai Taonga 2024), and Floreana (Ruiz-Ballesteros & del Campo Tejedor 2024). Lord Howe and Venotene had survivors escape the original eradication phase found about 18 months into the monitoring phase but follow up work successfully eradicated the survivors. Floreana has successfully eradicated feral goats. The following summary of key issues was developed and used to inform question prompts for interviews in this SIA and points for investigation.

- Early, inclusive and clear community engagement is vital to the success of a project. High quality communications and quick responses to queries through the entire eradication process is required.
- Local knowledge and inclusion of locals to co-design is also critical to the project. Community champions can support engagement and understanding of the project and engage directly.
- Island populations often have an understanding and general support for conservation goals and pest control as a method to achieve these. In addition, rats are generally disliked. However, this does not mean the community understands all the technical

[25] Largest ground-based rat eradication, seasonal fishing lodge population of up to 460, 3100 ha.

aspects. It is important to respect locals' attitudes, how they view the eradication and how it will affect them. Even if supportive of the general goal, there are frequently concerns about the feasibility and costs of a project, and potential for negative reputation due to toxin use.

- Communities are concerned about toxin use, particularly aerially distributed toxin and its effects on non-target species (by-kill), as well as the possibility of poison getting into fresh and coastal water, land and flora. Use of aerial toxin is frequently more concerning to people than ground-based toxin distribution. Ground-based eradication of rats is possible, but is size limited, takes longer, is more costly, and requires longer and more intensive monitoring.
- Predator control will have ecological benefits especially for bird life and enable reintroductions of rare and locally extinct species. In addition, there are a range of potential social and economic benefits and these need to be identified and communicated to the community alongside the ecological benefits.
- Local employment and upskilling locals in predator control techniques is important to provide local economic benefits and builds community support. While external technical expertise is required, several projects had 50% local employees. Locals can be used in preparation work (e.g. creating tracks, laying out traps), eradication (e.g. filling bait stations), and post-eradication monitoring.
- Accommodation for workers is often restricted on islands and needs to be properly planned for the length of the project. Accommodation can be sought from local providers, or if new accommodation is to be built it should be designed so that after the project it can support an island's accommodation stock. Other ways for a project to support the local economy is purchasing camp supplies and groceries from local suppliers.
- There is an increase in ecotourism and interest in islands from being rodent free. Island communities see this as both a positive and negative impact. A post-eradication survey on Lord Howe found 59% of respondents consider the eradication of rodents to be beneficial to tourism.
- Communities are concerned about the risk of domestic animals and stock eating poison or getting trapped. Plans for livestock and domestic animals are required and methods to protect them could include building animal pens / housing to restrict farm and domestic animals during bait operations.
- There are clear positive benefits of rodent control for agriculture, infrastructure, governments and households through removing rodent damage to crops, wires, equipment, and food. There are also direct financial savings from no longer having to purchase rodent bait and traps. Work on Venotene estimated the cost savings as €8,500 per year. A survey post eradication on Lord Howe had 88% of respondents stating that the eradication was beneficial to the local economy.
- Island communities often use a variety of rodent baits on a small scale, but not always as per instructions which can cause safety risks. Therefore, there is a benefit of avoiding these risks completely post eradication.
- There are public health benefits from the removal of rodents and their associated diseases.
- Individual household agreements have been used on Lord Howe and Floreana for both plans and access agreements. On Floreana, individual household discussions were chosen as more appropriate than community meetings.

- Feral goat removal on Floreana was imposed on the community. While it has been successful and the community accepts it happened, it has resulted in a loss of connection to the land and nostalgia for goat hunting trips. Goats were a food source and provided economic income to the community.
- While access to all properties is ideal, access was refused to two properties on Venotene and four properties on Lord Howe. This lack of access may have contributed to survivors on both islands post eradication, but in the long-term eradication was still successful.
- Lord Howe targeted mice and has successfully eradicated them. Venotene did not target mice and they are still present. Remaining mice made monitoring more difficult including false rat sightings.
- Biosecurity and monitoring need to be designed and tested before eradication and be continuous post eradication. On both Lord Howe and Venotene it took approximately 18 months before survivors were identified. 10 years after eradication on St Agnes signs of mice were found[26].

Lord Howe, while successful, is well known for its torturous path to eradication and community conflicts[27]. A lessons-learnt report released in 2025 reflected on the difficulties with the community engagement process and found that the project had not understood the scale of engagement needed at the start of the project. They recommend a social impact plan and community engagement plan for other projects before proceeding to eradication, and that social feasibility needs to be equally weighted with technical feasibility. Bell (2019) considered that allowing 10 years for community engagement is not unreasonable.

3.6.2 Key lessons from feral cat eradications

Feral cat suppression and eradication projects on inhabited islands include Ascencion (Ratcliffe et al. 2010), the Cocos Islands (Algar et al. 2003), Christmas Island (Johnston et al. 2019), Rakiura (Russell et al. 2017) and Aotea (Parkes 2022; Tū Mai Taonga 2024). Island communities are often concerned about feral cats, including their impact on wildlife and public health risks from disease. Therefore, communities are often supportive or even the driver of feral cat eradication, however they may still have concerns about methods especially the use of poison. Ascencion Island had a high mortality rate for domestic cats – 38% – with poison used within 1km of inhabited areas (Ratcliffe et al. 2009). Ratcliffe et al. (2009) recommend extending this buffer in other feral cat eradications with specific range studies of domestic cats to be completed before poison use for cats to inform an exact buffer zone.

The other issue is management of domestic cats. Desexing of domestic cats usually precedes feral cat eradication including on Ascencion Island, Christmas Island, the Cocos and Rakiura. By-laws can also be used to manage the movement of cats to or from an island, for example cats can only be taken to Rakiura if they are neutered and microchipped (Environment Southland 2019). Desexing on Aotea is not required but recommended and funded by Auckland Council (Aotea Advocate 2025). On Christmas Island, existing domestic cats can remain but cannot be replaced which is a concern to the local community. On Ascencion microchipping, neutering and registering was paid for by the eradication project and while domestic cats can be

[26] https://www.acap.aq/fr/actualites/dernieres-nouvelles/eradication-is-not-the-end-of-it-signs-of-a-mouse-of-st-agnes-show-the-need-for-continued-biosecurity
[27] https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/may/07/a-nasty-place-at-the-moment-lord-howe-island-tense-as-rat-baiting-begins

imported, there is a high cost to do so (Ratcliffe et al. 2009). Another important factor in a feral cat eradication is the identification of domestic cats to enable them to be released from traps. Microchipping is a very secure method of identifying domestic cats, but it does come at a cost and requires a vet to do the micro-chipping. Other ways include using collars, marking paint, or identifying features. For example, on Aotea Great Barrier a 'Cat-alogue' is run with owners able to upload photos and details, which cat trappers can check when a potential domestic cat is caught in a live trap[28].

Chatham Island Skink (Oligosoma nigriplantare). Photo by: Dave Boyle

[28] https://www.greatbarrier.co.nz/the-cat-alogue-responsible-cat-ownership-on-aotea/

4 Social and economic baseline

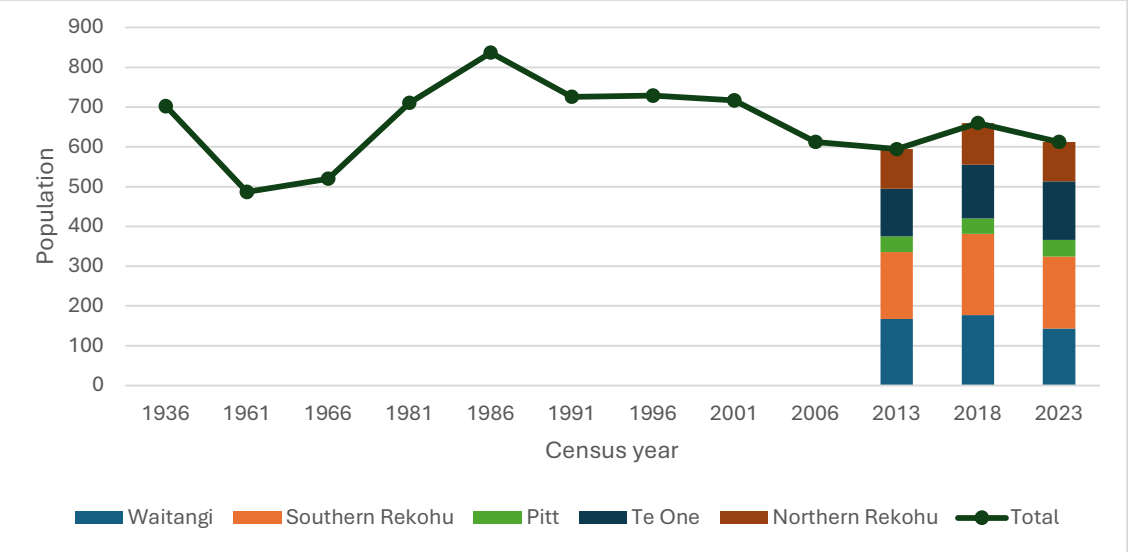
The social and economic baseline of the Chathams is a story of irregular development and a slow transition from paternalistic decision making from New Zealand to a partnership built on strengthening local institutions across the CIC, CIET, imi and iwi (Rennie 2022). Over time there has been considerable investment in infrastructure, yet the economy remains fragile, with limited shipping services affecting agriculture and declining sustainability of the in-shore fishery most accessible by islanders. Tourism shows potential, especially for small-scale, nature-based, and locally owned businesses. This part of the report examines the socio-economic background to PFC and how CILRT can drive momentum towards conservation as a cornerstone of the Chathams economy and society.

4.1 Demographics

4.1.1 Population

The population of that Chathams has fluctuated from 702 in 1936 to a high of 837 in 1986, dropping to around 600 since 2006: 612 in 2006, 594 in 2013, 660 in 2018, and 612 in 2023 (see Figure 4). In 2023, there were 150 families, and 240 households across the Chathams (StatsNZ 2025). On Pitt Island, the population has grown from 39 in 2013 and 2018 to 42 in 2023. In 2018 and 2023, the census night population was approximately 60 people higher than the usual resident population, most likely as a result of tourists or people temporarily in the Chathams for work. Noting that not all usually resident people will have been on the island on census night, the number of tourists or people temporarily on the island for work is likely higher.

Figure 4: Census usually resident population



Sources: Stats NZ; Taylor Baines 2002, 2008, Arbuckle 1971, see also Martin Jenkins, 2017

4.1.2 Age of the population

The age breakdown of the population is an issue raised in previous reports and by people we talked to, who point to the low numbers of children, youth and young adults. As a result, the median age in the Chathams has remained above the total New Zealand median age – and in 2023 the median age in the Chathams has increased to the highest in the last 10 years. In NZ, the 2023 median age returned to the same level as 2013 after a dip in median age in 2018 in

both the Chathams and New Zealand as a whole (see Table 3). Across the Chathams, the median age is lower on Pitt Island and in Te One. One reason for a lower population age in Te One could be the concentration of DOC workers living in this area in 2023. Both Southern and Northern areas of Chatham Island, including the other settlements of Kaingaroa, Port Hutt and Owenga, have a higher median age.

Table 3: Median age

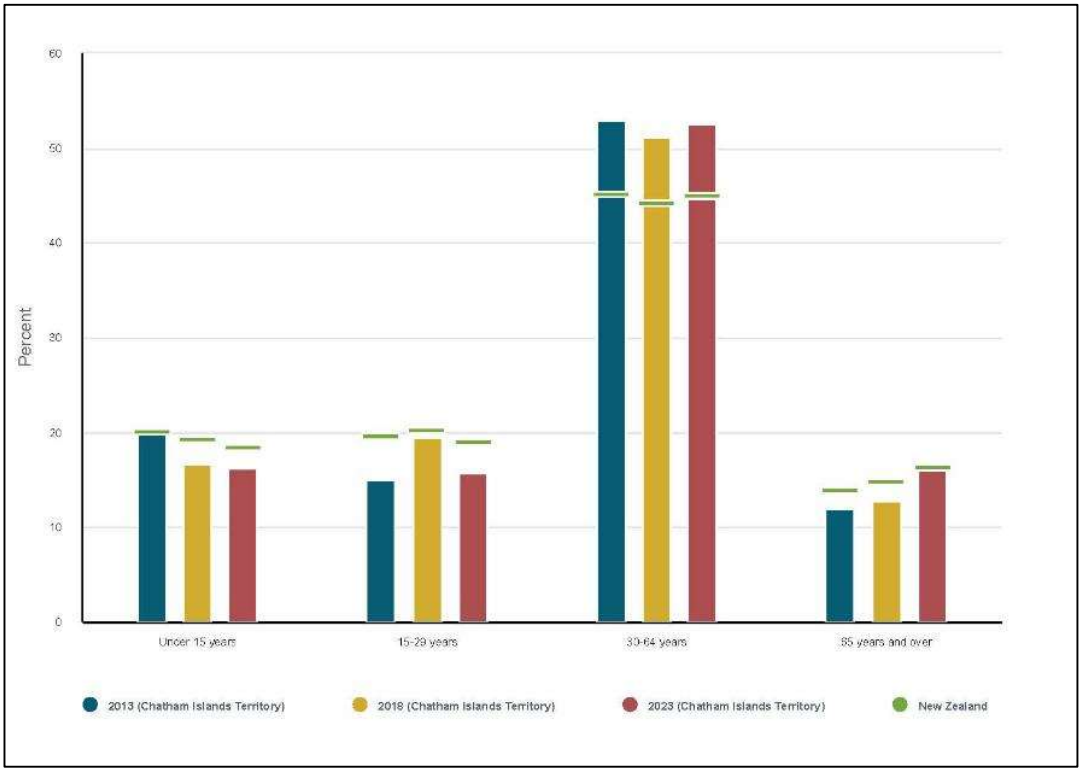
	2013	2018	2023
Waitangi	44.6	43.7	44.9
Southern Chatham Island	40.2	42.3	47.6
Pitt	39.7	37.3	38.1
Te One	40.4	38.0	36.0
Northern Chatham Island	41.4	43.4	47.1
Chathams	42.3	41.9	44.0
NZ (total inc. Chatham Islands)	38.0	37.4	38.1

The Chathams has a lower proportion of younger people, under 15 and 15 to 29 years, and older people, aged 65 and older, than the whole of New Zealand. However, the proportion of people aged 30 to 64, the main working population, is greater than in New Zealand (see Figure 5). Across the Chathams there has been a reduction in the proportion of the population aged under 15, which is also reflected in the changes in school rolls. Primarily this reduction in the proportion of under 15-year-olds has been in Southern and Northern Chatham Island (see Table 4). However, the drop has been most severe in the primary school (age 10 to 14) age range. The number of under 5-year-olds has remained consistent each census, with 36 in 2023, which will flow through into the primary school age group over the next few years. There has also been a drop in the proportion of 15- to 29-year-olds in these areas along with Pitt Island, while there has been growth in the proportion of this age group in Waitangi. For the primary working aged group, 30 to 64, there has been a reduction in the proportion of people in this age group in Waitangi and a small drop in Pitt Island and Te One, with stability in southern Chatham Island and growth in northern Chatham Island. Reflecting the national trend of 'baby boomers' moving into retirement age, the proportion of people aged 65 and older has grown everywhere except Te One where there has been a small drop.

Table 4: Age breakdown for main lifecycle groups

	Under 15 years			15-29 years			30-64 years			65 years and over		
	2013	2018	2023	2013	2018	2023	2013	2018	2023	2013	2018	2023
Waitangi	16%	14%	15%	14%	17%	21%	55%	56%	48%	14%	12%	17%
Southern Chatham Island	23%	19%	15%	14%	16%	10%	57%	56%	57%	9%	10%	17%
Pitt	31%	23%	29%	23%	15%	7%	54%	54%	50%	8%	8%	14%
Te One	18%	22%	18%	20%	20%	22%	48%	44%	45%	18%	13%	16%
Northern Chatham Island	27%	11%	12%	12%	29%	9%	52%	43%	58%	12%	17%	21%
Chathams total	21%	17%	16%	16%	19%	15%	54%	51%	51%	13%	12%	17%

Figure 5: Percentage of population by life-cycle age group, Chatham Islands Territory and New Zealand, 2013–2023 Censuses



4.1.3 Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, 95% of the Chathams population declared that they were born in New Zealand[29] in the 2023 census (Stats NZ 2025). In the Chathams, 68.6% of residents identify as Māori, a key feature of the project background, significantly more than the 17.8% for New Zealand as a whole. Under the census, Moriori are counted as being of Māori descent and are identified as an iwi (see Section 4.1.4 for more discussion of imi/iwi). Respondents to the census can identify as more than one ethnicity, and 72% identify as New Zealand European compared to 62% for New Zealand as a whole (see Table 5). There is also a very small number of people that identify as Other European, Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Southeast Asian, Chinese, Latin American, African and Other Ethnicity.

[29] This could include the Chathams, however until recently giving birth on the islands was not possible.

Table 5: Percentage of population that identify with each ethnic group (level 2), Chatham Islands Territory and New Zealand, 2023 Census (selected ethnic groups of relevance to Chathams, excluded ethnic groups were 0% for Chathams)

Category	Chatham Islands Territory	New Zealand (includes Chathams)
New Zealand European	71.6%	62.1%
Other European	2.5%	6.8%
Māori	68.6%	17.8%
Samoan	1.5%	4.3%
Cook Islands Māori	2.0%	1.9%
Tongan	0.5%	2.0%
Niuean	0.5%	0.7%
Southeast Asian	0.5%	3.5%
Chinese	0.5%	5.6%
Latin American	0.5%	0.8%
African	0.5%	0.4%
Other Ethnicity	1.5%	1.1%

4.1.4 Moriori and Ngāti Mutunga

The first human settlers in the Chathams were East Polynesians, known today as Moriori, arriving around 1400CE (Richards 2025). They most likely came directly from central East Polynesia and on canoes from Aotearoa (evidenced by obsidian remnants from Mayor Island). Together these migrant people developed a distinct Moriori culture (Anderson 2018). Pākehā first arrived at the islands in 1791 and European whalers and sealers followed. Māori from Ngāti Tama and Ngāti Mutunga invaded in 1835, killing some and enslaving the rest of the Moriori (Richards 2025). Today, the Chathams have two recognised imi/iwi: ta imi Moriori and Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri iwi. Both are counted as Māori in the census ethnicity. People who identify as Māori or are not sure in the census, are then asked to identify all the imi/iwi they belong to with the option to identify up to 16 imi/iwi (StatsNZ 2024).

For New Zealand as a whole, only a small proportion of people who knew their iwi at census 2023 identify as Moriori (0.22%) or Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri (0.37%), but the number of people identifying with the Chathams imi and iwi has grown significantly from 2013 to 2023 – 738 to 1806 for Moriori and 1644 to 2961 for Ngāti Mutunga[30]. Not all members of HMT and NMW live in the Chathams. In 2023, the largest number of Moriori people lived in the Canterbury Region – 435 people – while the Chathams itself has 102 people who identify as Moriori. Auckland and Wellington regions both had over 200 people identifying as Moriori and Hawke's Bay 120, with other regions fewer than 100 people. For NMW the picture is similar with Canterbury having the highest number of people who identify to this iwi – 948 – and the Chathams with 252 people. Wellington had 423 people and Auckland 306 with Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Manawatū-Whanganui Region, and Bay of Plenty Regions having around 100 people and other regions fewer than 100 people. We note that individuals can identify as both Moriori and Ngāti Mutunga (Wharekauri / Chatham Islands).

[30] Note iwi data for Census 2018 was not released due to difficulties with data collection.

4.2 Governance and administration

4.2.1 Overview

Administration of the Chathams has been an evolving and thwart process since early European settlement. Most notable is the historically dominant role of the NZ Government through laws and policies relating to the Chathams, and the often-reticent funding available to support local government and help build island infrastructure and services, as found on New Zealand (Arbuckle 1971; Rennie 2022). Often the relationship seems to islanders as one-sided, paternalistic and simply unfair.

The roles of the Treaty partners, both imi and iwi, are developing and will increase as their Treaty settlements are finalised and tribal structures, economic investments and social roles are consolidated. In terms of settlement and redress, HMT has settled with its settlement administered through the Moriori Imi Settlement Trust (MIST)[31]. Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri are close to a Crown settlement under the Waitangi Tribunal with one final issue to be resolved due to Moriori court proceedings.[32] Island leadership work together to support investment strategies including on infrastructure, tourism and PFC (Kāhui Manu Tāiko 2024).

A Chatham Islands council was established in 1901 but struggled over the next century to develop a strong voice or to become the principal administrator of the islands. Instead, the islanders were largely run by government agencies such as the Department of Internal Affairs, with leadership falling on off-island administrators and commissioners and for periods on resident agents.

The CIC and Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust (CIET) were designed to be parallel governance structures with different but complementary roles (Taylor Baines 2008; Glennie 2022). However, in recent years a quadrumvirate has emergence for island governance: CIC, CIET, HMT and NMW. These organisations are involved in island leadership, often with individual leaders having overlapping roles between them. The leadership grouping in these organisations is now commonly part of collaborative strategic thinking and decision making, such with the development of the Chatham Islands Investment Strategy 2024–28. Most importantly, their collective vision has a clear focus on re-establishing the island korowai through habitat protection and restoration actions to: *Develop and implement habitat restoration and protection and Predator Free Chathams 2050*.

The Council also convenes the biannual Chatham Islands Stakeholder Forum, which meets in Waitangi and Wellington to discuss the wide range of social, economic, environmental, and cultural issues faced by the Islands. The forum brings together the island governance entities with central government departments and other organisations as required. This mechanism enables forum members to monitor progress with strategies and infrastructure investments, and to integrate actions across member agencies and groups in a collaborative approach.

4.2.2 The Chatham Islands Council

The current CIC was established under the Chatham Islands Council Act (1995) as the primary governance body for the islands, not as a unitary authority but it fulfils most of the functions of district and regional councils. The Council consists of a mayor and eight councillors and provides administration and the provision of infrastructure for the unique context of these

[31] https://www.moriori-imi-trust.nz/moriori-imi-settlement-trust/about-mist/
[32] https://www.nmow.iwi.nz/treaty-settlement-negotiation-update/.

small, remote communities. The special legislation changed administration from the previous Chatham Islands Council to a full district council operating under the Local Government Act and other acts such as the Resource Management and Building Acts consistent with New Zealand councils. But the CIC also has additional powers such as the ability to levy dues on imported and exported goods.

Since 2004, central government has granted funding for CIC to help in meeting its obligations as a regional council. The Council raises around $725,000 annually through rates and fees and approximately 95% ($8.55M) of their income is provided by the Crown in recognition of their special location and circumstances. While essential, this support is conditional on meeting performance settings agreed in regular reviews by DIA[33].

Some of the Council obligations around environmental management were provided through a contract with ECAN, although this arrangement will end on 30 June 2026. CIC are now in the process of negotiating a new contract, potentially with Auckland Council. The ECAN contract has included land and freshwater management, biosecurity, including ensuring keeping the islands pest free (see also Section 3.5 above), natural hazard management, resource consents, compliance and monitoring, and navigational safety. Comments to us suggested Auckland Council will have a particular understanding of island ecosystems, their protection, regeneration and biosecurity, as well as community needs and wellbeing, which may be beneficial if a contract with Auckland Council is secured. However, there is also a risk that institutional knowledge held at ECAN will be lost when the current contract finishes.

Comments also suggested the Council struggles to meet all their obligations despite Crown funding and the ability to raise levies. A particular concern is their limited ability to enforce regulations such as fencing along roads or waterways or carry out environmental monitoring. Recently the Council joined the LAWA platform so the public can access data on local conditions[34].

Kahukura on buddlelia Photo by: Greer Sanger

[33] Paul Eagle, Chief Executive, Newsletter email, 29-10-25

[34] www.cic.govt.nz/your-council/news-and-events/2025/chatham-islands-environmental-data-now-live-on-lawa

4.2.3 The Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust

The CIET was formed in 1991 following a review of the Chathams economy in 1989 and formed part of a major shift in the way the Government approached support for Chatham Islands infrastructure and services such as shipping and air transport (Taylor Baines 2008; Rennie 2022). These changes also led into the development of the Council as the preeminent administrative body in the Islands. They also showed an underlying shift in development philosophy from a highly paternalistic approach to one where Chatham Islanders were much more responsible for leading and operating development projects.

Set up with starting equity of eight million dollars and some initial quota holdings the Trust has built a strong asset base of $95.4m in 2025, primarily in fishing quota, and operates key infrastructure through separate commercial entities including the port, airport, electricity generation and shipping. The Trust also provides support for individuals and businesses in its charitable and community roles in support of education and other social and economic developments[35].

There has been ongoing review of the relationship between the Council and the CIET. The review by Taylor Baines (2008) concluded they should remain separate entities, and there is a clear benefit that their legacy capital fund, largely built from adroit purchases of fishing quota (Rennie 2022), should remain independent of Council – islanders commented similarly to us on the need for this separation. Nonetheless, the leaders of the Council and CIET meet regularly to review governance arrangements, guided by councillors and trustees, Agite consultancy in Wellington, public workshops and a survey of residents. One move widely seen as positive in the community is the CIET office is now housed in the new Council building to facilitate collaboration. In the meantime, the CIET operating businesses for the airport, port, shipping, and electricity run as stand-alone enterprises, while further synergies are considered. Discussion of infrastructure and services follows in later sections.

4.2.4 Department of Conservation

DOC has an office in Waitangi (in a shared space with CIC) and housing, biosecurity and storage facilities in Te One. Staff based in the Chathams are part of the wider Wairarapa – Chathams Office. This has been a significant shift since a 2024 restructuring of the DOC office in the Chathams, when the Chathams Office was merged with Wairarapa and a new operating model commenced. DOC's initial media stated that the on-island staff reduction was from 10.5 FTE to 7 FTE[36] but the general perception on the island was from 15 to 2 and a half staff members. When we visited in September 2025, on-island staff consisted of one full time ranger, one part-time ranger and one business support person in Waitangi with a casual part-time contract ranger on Pitt Island, but there were also several vacant ranger roles in the Chathams office. Principal rangers manging workstreams, e.g. operations and biodiversity, and the area office manager are based in the Wairarapa Office. Since our field research in September 2025, three contract Rangers have started in the Chathams office to cover vacant roles and there is ongoing work to recruit, permanently fill and refine on-island roles. In addition, the Wairarapa operations team and wider DOC seasonal workers undertake seasonal and short-term projects on the island.

[35] https://www.chathamislandsenterprisetrust.com/about and 2025 Annual report.
[36] www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2024-media-releases/restructure-of-doc-team-on-chatham-island

The goal of DOC is to operate with a smaller group of permanent on-island staff, supported by the wider Wairarapa team, and contractors from off and on island. Services such as fencing, predator control, species management and other staff will be contracted out with a focus on local procurement. However, DOC notes that this is a new model of working and will take time to bed in. There are also challenges for local contractors, e.g. fencing companies, to meet DOC's procurement standards and DOC staff are actively supporting local companies to put in place the actions needed to meet those standards so they can bid for contract work.

Alongside DOC's operational work, there are other DOC teams that work in the Chathams space, including partnerships, Ngā Whenua Rāhui, Threatened Species, Predator Free, and the National Eradication Team. While there are direct working relationships between these teams and community partners DOC identified that there has been a lack of coordination between teams and that it is difficult for external stakeholders to identify who to talk to at times. In October 2025 a Kaiārahi Hōtaka / Programme Lead, Chatham Islands role was appointed in the Wairarapa team. This role includes creating a longer-term strategy and plan for operations in the Chatham Islands, to connect internal DOC teams and maximise opportunities from DOC work on the Chathams, while providing a single point of contact for the Chathams community and stakeholders.

The Chatham Islands Conservation Management Strategy (DOC 1999) was published in 1999 by DOC in consultation with the Chatham Island Conservation Board. This is a statutory document under the Conservation Act. Although this Strategy sets the policy directions for the islands it is now out of date. Currently the Government is making changes to the conservation legislation and conservation management strategies will be replaced by a new National Conservation Policy Statement and supporting Area Plans[37].

4.2.5 Ministry of Primary Industries

MPI is another key organisation for the Chathams, with policies and programmes across agriculture, fishing and biosecurity. For fishing their role covers commercial fishing in- and off-shore, and recreational fishing. In-shore fishing regulations covers quota management and regulations around species such as crayfish, pāua and kina. Off-shore commercial fishing is predominantly on the Chatham Rise where the Quota Management System covers species such as orange roughy, ling and bluenose – that are largely fished by boats based in New Zealand. Fisheries officers have come and gone over time. There is a fisheries management officer based in the MPI office in Waitangi, who principally works with Chathams-based fishers on in-shore fishery. The fisheries officer has a role in monitoring recreational and commercial fishing regulations such as catch size and quota limits. The officer has close working relationships with the island fishery associations. Community views on fishing for recreation and livelihoods are discussed in more depth in Section 5.9.2.

Past involvement of the previous Ministry of Agriculture (now MPI) was on raising productivity through pasture improvement and fencing. An increasing reliance on shipping has seen greater emphasis on animal welfare conditions and application of animal welfare regulations. Welfare issues led to the large feral cattle cull discussed in Section 5.7 but there is no animal welfare officer present as management is based in Christchurch. Note animal control issues, such as fencing of roadsides, are dealt with by CIC.

[37] https://www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2025-media-releases/unleashing-growth-on-conservation-land/

Biosecurity is another MPI responsibility in terms of pests and diseases entering the country and managing any incursions. On the Chathams, biosecurity is run jointly with CIC, ECAN and DOC (see Section 5.5).

4.3 Economy and employment

The Chatham Island economy is based on fishing and extensive pastoral farming but with a legacy of boom and bust in these two key sectors (Arbuckle 1971; Barker 1984). More recently there has been expanding tourism activity (see Section 4.3.4). There are also people employed in administration, infrastructure, and social services (health and education). More people are employed full time and part-time in their primary job than in New Zealand (Table 6). This difference in both categories reflects a high participation rate, as noted also by Martin Jenkins (2017). Our field research confirmed that people often work part-time across more than one sector to make up their livelihoods, which is a common feature of island communities (Dickey & Theodossiou 2006). If it is not possible to maintain a sufficient livelihood it is likely people will leave the islands for work, creating a churn in population as well as a net migration loss over protracted periods as in recent years as discussed in Section 4.1 above.

Table 6: Percentage of population by work and labour force status, Chatham Islands Territory and New Zealand, 2013–2023 Censuses

Category	2013 (Chatham Islands Territory)	2018 (Chatham Islands Territory)	2023 (Chatham Islands Territory)	2023 (New Zealand)
Employed Full-time	58.7%	57.6%	59.6%	51.2%
Employed Part-time	16.1%	19.6%	19.3%	13.4%
Unemployed	1.9%	1.6%	2.9%	3%
Not in the Labour Force	23.2%	20.7%	18.1%	32.4%

Figure 6 shows how the business activity that provides employment is distributed across sectors. The data confirms the predominance of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It is also useful to note that employment in tourism is spread across several sectors: accommodation and food services, rental and hiring activity, transport, arts and recreation and retail trade.

Figure 6: Businesses in the Chatham Islands Territory by industry, New Zealand

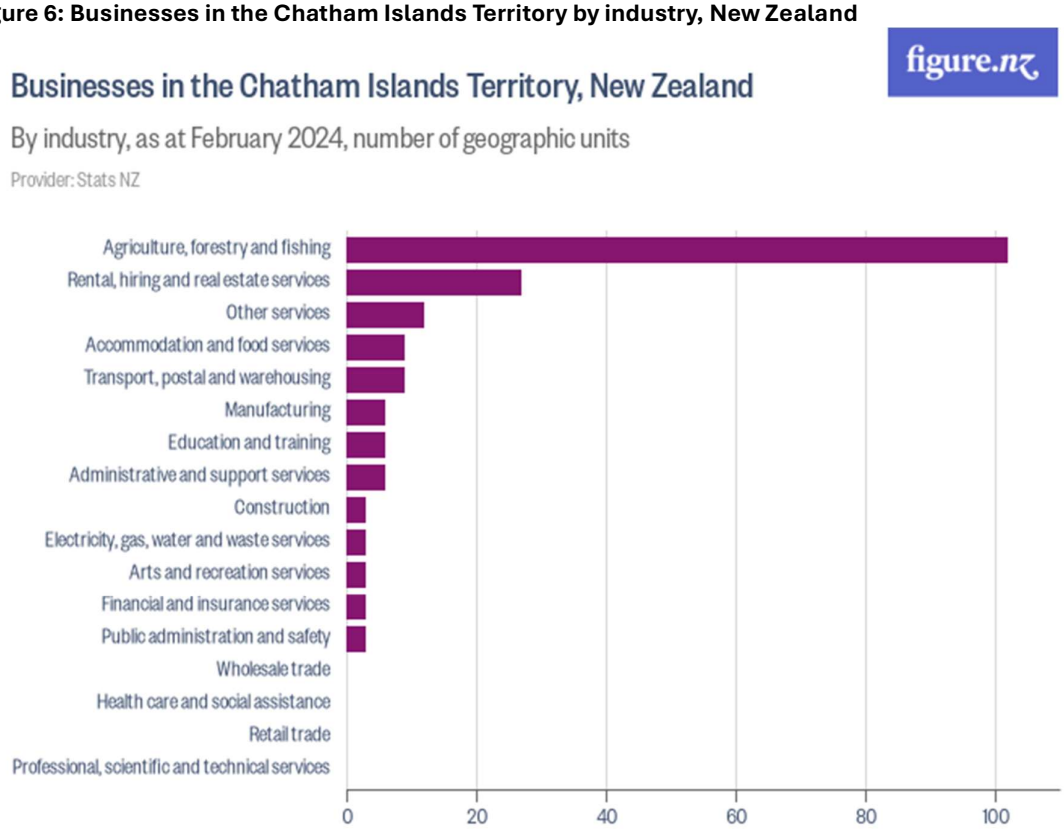
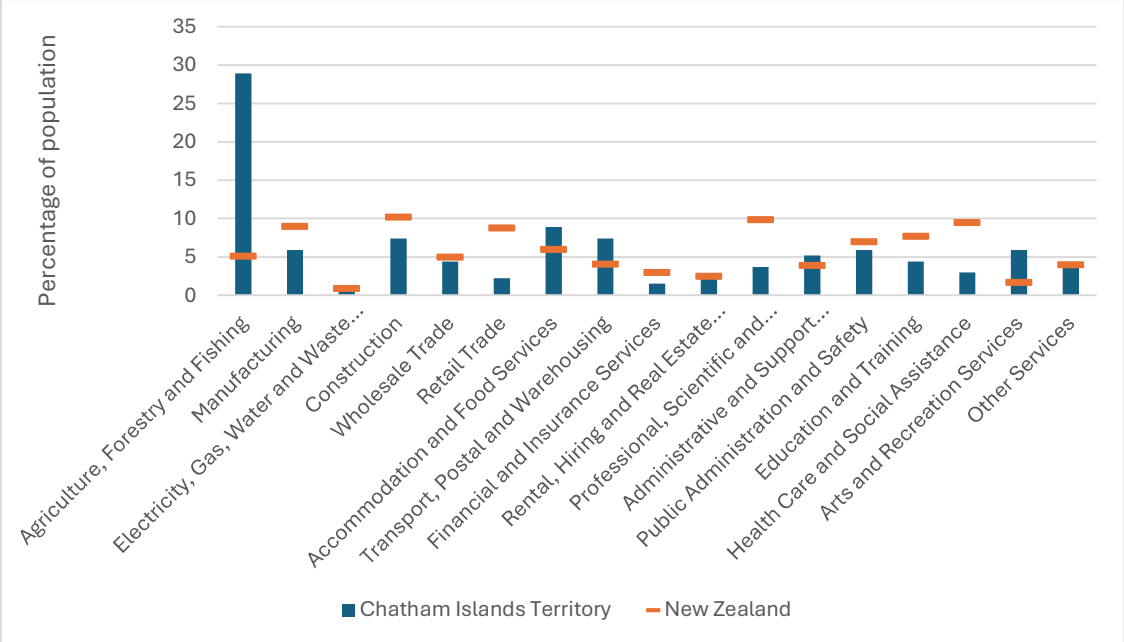


Figure 7: Percentage of population by industry (2023 Census)



Note mining and information media and telecommunications industries are excluded from table as none employed in these industries.

4.3.1 Agriculture

There is a long and often fraught history of pastoral farming on the Chathams since the mid-1880s, initially based on the export of wool. Through the 1900s difficulties continued such that Arbuckle (1971) reports that the potential of island agriculture remained unrealised despite the possibilities of improvements in the form of stock selection, fertiliser, over sowing and fencing. Today agriculture has adopted many of these improvements, with increased productivity, and remains a mainstay in the islands' economy through exports of store lambs and cattle, and some wool, and makes a significant contribution to the social and economic character of the islands. However, there was an overall fall in livestock numbers (mainly sheep and cattle) and wool production since the 1980s.[38] The sharp drop in numbers was the result of poor returns, the poor financial viability of meat processing on island, and the costs and unreliability of shipping livestock to New Zealand (Taylor Baines 2008). Efforts to process sheep meat on island are reported by Arbuckle (1971) when the abattoir failed economically. More lately, renewed investigation of options to process meat on the islands have come to nought. Islanders point out that with large numbers of livestock having to be killed due to a lack of shipping, and the associated disincentives to modern farming, the priority is to solve the shipping problem and then consider meat processing, including for pet food. Small goods are another possibility for on-island production given considerable experience with food (seafood) processing on the islands. The issues around shipping are discussed in more detail below.

There is also a long history of horticultural production, initially to supply sailing vessels in the 1800s developing to the export of potatoes on vessels heading to New Zealand and Australia. Small amounts of vegetables including potatoes and greens are sold at the local shops, and we talked to people interested in expanding production for locals, visitors and tourists. Honey is another sector with potential to grow, with local sales to visitors available and some exports of honey, including experiments with freeze-dried honey[39]. Speciality honey can draw on tarahinau (*Dracophyllum arboreum*), a wetland scrub bush that is being tested for health benefits. Biosecurity is an issue for keeping pests and diseases from New Zealand out of the hives.

4.3.2 Forestry and native nurseries

With a long history of deforestation there is an incentive for farmers to plant exotic trees for purposes such as fencing, and stock shelter (Arbuckle 1971). Some trees have been milled for local building over time. Planting has focused on woodlots and shelter lines using cypress, pine and eucalypt species. The CIET has some small plantations of macrocarpa (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) intended for local use.

A recent driver for change in the forestry sector is the One Billion Trees programme. Announced in 2018, this programme is delivered through grants, partnership projects and Crown forestry with the goal of planting one billion trees across New Zealand. The Chathams was granted funding for three projects to deliver 199,514 native trees over 176 hectares[40]. HMT was a significant beneficiary of these grants, with projects including training islanders for the work, establishing infrastructure, and developing nurseries, as well as funding the physical trees and

[38] www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/558501/energy-and-shipping-decisions-needed-before-meatworks-chatham-islands-mayor

[39] https://ourwayoflife.co.nz/what-is-freeze-dried-honey-meet-the-chatham-islands-apiculturists-turning-their-liquid-gold-into-meringue-like-chunks

[40] https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/funding-tree-planting-research/one-billion-trees-programme/progress-towards-planting-one-billion-trees/one-billion-trees-fund-approved-direct-grants

planting projects. Working with Southern Rewilding since 2022 has enabled significant planting over short periods, for example 37,000 trees in two weeks[41].

A stimulus to native forestry through restoration was the Jobs for Nature Covid-19 recovery project funding. Across New Zealand Jobs for Nature granted a total of $1.185 billion to 524 projects[42]. In the Chathams, projects included restoration work such as Wharekauri Taiao for restoration in the southwest covenants, Miriams Reserve and feral cat control on Pitt Island.

There have been small-scale nurseries on the Chatham Islands for some time, both private nurseries supporting private restoration work and commercial operations providing plants to restoration work such as to DOC. Although, nurseries report that DOC has not bought any trees for over a year following their restructure and nursery owners are unsure whether this small but steady demand for native plants will continue.

As part of One Billion Trees, $162,679 was granted to the partnership project Chatham Islands nursery collective[43]. This project funded the start-up of around six nurseries, employing nine women across the island. While nursery set up had its difficulties and required mentoring and support from established nursery owners, it created local employment and diversified income streams. However, following the end of both One Billion Trees and Jobs for Nature funding, most of these nurseries are no longer operating as there is not the demand for plants now, and most cannot deliver to the scale required by the Tāmata Hauhā organisation.

The most recent shift for forestry is carbon farming. In the last 18 months, several landowners have considered or started carbon farming – sequestering carbon through planting trees or allowing natural regeneration to earn carbon credits. Several of the large stations have placed part of the farm, usually unproductive land, in covenants for regeneration. For example, Owenga Station placing 1000 ha in Owenga Reserve[44]. Under the NZETS areas can be fenced off for natural regeneration, but landowners can also undertake supplementary planting. Restoration projects have an impact on the demand for plant propagation on the island, and link to the wider restoration of the islands as well as weed and predator control.

The arrival of significant planting projects in the last 5 to 6 years has changed positively the demand profile for native plant nurseries on the Chathams and the community supports this increase for private, community, imi, iwi and public projects and see the link to island restoration.

4.3.3 Fishing

The fishing sector is also a large source of employment for the island population as shown in Figures 6 & 7. Many people have jobs in fishing, often part-time and seasonal in addition to employment in other sectors. Together, meat and fish also provide an important part of local food security, along with hunting for pigs, and hunting and recreational fishing are also attractions for visitors.

Pāua Fishing is an “artisan” from of commercial fishery, focused on crayfish, pāua, cod and kina, fished in shore using methods such as pots and free diving. Offshore, long-liners fish for ling, bluenose and other species. Fishing is undertaken by vessels based in the Chathams as

[41] https://southernrewilding.nz/projects/doing-our-part-on-chatham-island
[42] https://www.jobsfornature.govt.nz/
[43] https://www.mpi.govt.nz/forestry/funding-tree-planting-research/one-billion-trees-programme/progress-towards-planting-one-billion-trees/one-billion-trees-fund-partnership-projects
[44] https://www.permanentforests.com/owenga-reserve

well as New Zealand. Fishing is controlled under the quota management system and the setting of total, allowable commercial catch (TACC) (Taylor Baines 2008). Nowadays there is an emphasis on sustainability with local fishers in some years voluntarily reducing the proportion of TACC that they take. They also use techniques such as increased mesh sizes on cod pots, and pāua fishers have voluntarily divided the coast into 52 sections with locally determined limits on takes per section depending on how fishers observe the fishery performing.

Crayfish have been targeted commercially over a long period with a boom in fishing for this species in the1960s. At its peak in the 1968–69 season, well before quota management, there were estimated to be 450 commercial fishers, mostly from New Zealand and many living on their boats (Barker 1984). After this export boom the fish stock fell dramatically (Arbuckle 1971) and then declined steadily until 1995 before slowly growing back (Rudd et al. 2019). At present around 40 vessels based in Waitangi, Owenga and Kaingaroa fish in the area known as CRA 6, which is a relatively large area, but fishing is restricted to the waters around the Chathams.

Pāua are also important. PāuaMAC4 covers PAU4, the official designation for the Chathams pāua fishery area. The role of each PāuaMAC is to engage in regional issues and to develop projects appropriate to each fishery. They also carry out workplans and advocacy for their region.

Fishing in the Chathams. Photo by: Nick Taylor

Orange Roughy is another significant species, one largely fished from offshore on the Chatham Rise but recent stock assessments suggest this fishery is also over fished (beyond the sustainable limit) and facing collapse.[45] Commentary in the community as well as from fishers indicates that the fishing sector overall is struggling to be profitable. For the in-shore fishery they note there is greater focus on return for catch effort and maintenance of each TACC in a sustainable fishery.

The quota management system was designed to manage all fisheries more sustainably. However, it resulted in a trend to offshore ownership and quota ownership consolidated into a few large holders. Astute investment and direct quota ownership by the CIET, imi and iwi saw some consolidation of holdings back to island organisations, which allowed them to selectively recruit and encourage local fishers as lessees of quota, especially young fishers (Rennie 2022). Under the quota management system, the number of fishing vessels has remained relatively steady since the 1990s (Taylor Baines 2008), although current fishers report issues with

[45] https://newsroom.co.nz/2025/07/08/study-finds-nzs-largest-orange-roughy-fishery-facing-collapse

productivity and increase in effort to catch the same number of fish (labour and expenses such as fuel)[46] emphasising the need for local management solutions.

Since 1990, local fishing for the main commercial species of crayfish, pāua and cod has seen a greater focus on fish processing on island along with export of fresh and frozen product by air (Taylor Baines 2008). Blue cod has become a more significant catch in recent years due to opening of new markets for frozen fish. There are several fish processing plants, with ongoing investment, and these benefit also from investments made in port infrastructure in Waitangi, Owenga, Port Hutt and Flowerpot, and investments in the airport and air services (see section 4.4).

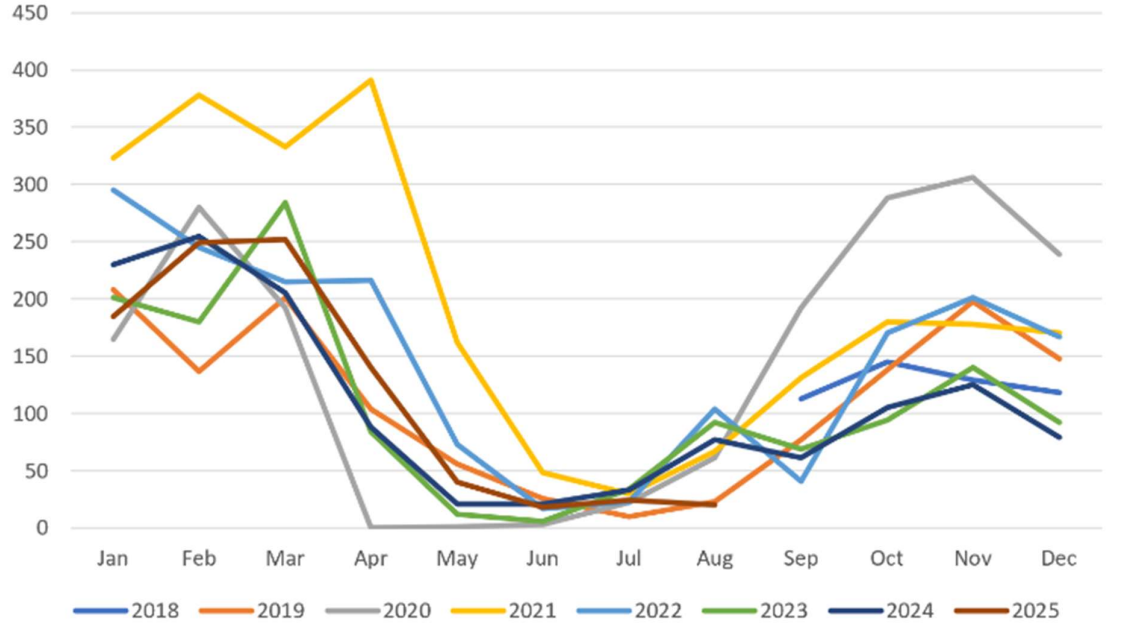
4.3.4 Tourism

Economic reviews by Taylor Baines in 2002 and 2008 found that tourism to the Chathams was starting to grow alongside improvements in air services, with potential to diversify the economy (see also Wiltshier & Cardow 2006). They identified tourism needs to be based on local resources with consideration for avoiding negative effects on the environment and the community. At that time "eco" tourism was the focus for visitors — tourists who are interested in the unique natural environment, geology, history and culture of the islands. International experience (Agius et al. 2019) points to the importance of unique habitats, often reflecting human impacts, on islands and the attraction of protected areas for developing visitor products. They found that a feature of island ecosystems, as also found on the Chathams (see Section 3), is the fragmentation of island habitats and areas of interest to visitors, necessitating lengthy travel between sites by tour groups, suitable roads and vehicles available to visitors.

Tourism Chatham Islands leads development of the tourism sector and considers natural values are central to tourism products on these islands. Their Tourism Chatham Islands Destination Management Plan 2022–2025 sets out the status of the tourism sector on the Chathams as the "third driver" of business activity (see also Figure 6) after farming and fishing. Tourism provides scope for further increases in business and employment activity, guided by this Plan. An indication of recent growth is the increase in tourism GDP from $2 million in 2016 to $5.1 million in 2021. Tourism peaked in 2021 (see Figure 8) during Covid-19 border closures, when New Zealand travellers headed to the Chathams as borders to international tourism were closed.[47] Most travellers were domestic at that time and they continue to be the primary market (Tourism Chatham Islands 2022). A recent step to increase exposure of the Chathams as a destination was to register Tourism Chatham Islands as an Associate Destination Office in the national RTO Network.

[46] https://nzrocklobster.co.nz/stock-summaries/cra6/
[47] https://chathamislands.co.nz/january-newsletter/

Figure 8: Tourism arrivals to the Chatham Islands September 2018–August 2025



Source: Tourism Chatham islands Minutes 9 September 2025.

There is a direct link between habitat restoration and protection and tourism, as pointed out in many of our interviews. The Management Plan has "Strategic Priority 4 – Protecting and Enhancing the Islands' Environmental and Cultural Tourism Assets". It notes that the Chathams provide "ecologically significant conservation reserves and habitats and host threatened and endangered species so the protection and enhancement of these assets is important to the tourism product that the Islands offer". This offer includes visitor participation in tree planting and trapping, for example, as discussed in Section 6.3 below.

An important aspect of the Tourism Management Plan is the need to work closely with the Chathams community to build community support and social licence to operate. Early research on tourism noted the importance of working with cultural groups on the islands and the importance of an "authentic" experience for attracting visitors (Wiltshier & Cardow 2006). Authenticity is an issue in tourism worldwide where visitor numbers can build to a level that engenders host community resistance, especially in small communities. The peak of visitor numbers during Covid provided an opportunity to evaluate perceptions of visitors by islanders. We found a range of views for and against a higher number of visitors than at present. Locals note that at present there is an increase in people on the air transport, and an increase in the active AirBnBs and small lodges, in addition to the one hotel. This hospitality activity provides part-time work, which suits the Chathams approach to building livelihoods across multiple sectors.

New signs at Blind Jims. Photo by: Nick Taylor

The number of independent travellers is low and there is preference for people travelling in small tour group as is common to date. However, despite the low numbers of visitors, some people commented that at the peak during Covid the numbers were too high and several observers identified that with the markedly seasonal pattern of visitors there is potential to spread any increase into the shoulder seasons. A recent grant has funded improved signage and toilets at key tourist locations such as Blind Jims and the walk at Awatotara. However, ongoing maintenance of facilities, especially toilets, is unfunded, which is causing difficulties.

Funding for expanded tourism infrastructure and maintenance, promotional activity and strategic planning is low. The Council has limited resources to fund Tourism Chatham Islands. The voluntary visitor levy assists and 'donations, koha, bequests, and other fundraising' raised $22,296 for Tourism Chatham Islands for the year ended 31 March 2025[48]. There is an opportunity to bid for other funding such as the International Visitor Levy funds[49], charitable grants and *ad hoc* funds such as the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund or regional development funds. Recent projects funded include the project to lengthen and strengthen the runway at Tuuta Airport, fund the Tourism Development Manager, and Jobs for Nature which funded local conservation projects.

4.4 Physical infrastructure

The substantial investment required for implementing PFC and to absorb any subsequent increase in population or visitor numbers will depend on the availability and quality of infrastructure on the Chathams. However, there has been a significant issue over an extended period regarding the development and upgrading of infrastructure, including roads, port facilities and shipping, airport upgrades, telecommunications, waste management and water supplies, as noted in a series of reviews and reports (see Arbuckle 1971; Taylor Baines 2008; Rennie 2022). Coordinated work by the Council, CIET and a government officials group has seen a significant investment over recent years. Completed projects include the airport upgrade to take larger aircraft and new terminal ($42m), Waitangi Port ($52m), Pitt Island Wharf ($4.9m), Durham Point Windfarm ($11m) and urgent repairs to Kaingaroa Wharf ($4m) with further work anticipated including replacement of the wharf. Nonetheless, infrastructure remains a constraint to economic and social development.

Infrastructure plans include road, water, waste, and airport upgrades, as detailed in the Council's Long-Term Plan 2024–34. An ongoing issue noted by the Council is the tendency to invest in what is affordable, which is not necessarily the best option in terms of performance over time[50]. Neither are current infrastructure solutions the most resilient to natural hazards (Thomas 2018).

In addition to the Long-Term Plan the Chatham Island Investment Strategy 2024–28 was prepared by the four Chathams governance groups: CIC, HMT, NMW and CIET[51]. This plan strives to present a coherent picture of infrastructure needs as a basis for negotiations with the government over funding proposals, while recognising the unique context faced by the Chathams, alongside the wellbeings noted in section 2.2 above. The Strategy reflects extensive

[48] file:///C:/Users/KJ/OneDrive/Work/Chatham%20Islands/CC58720_AnnualReturnSummary_AR005.pdf
[49] International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy (IVL)is currently set at $100 and applies to most international visitors, who pay before or at entry to NZ. The funds are administered 50/50 by DOC and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment to support conservation, tourism business development and community infrastructure costs where demand from visitors impacts host communities.
[50] https://www.cic.govt.nz/documents/long-term-plan-2024-2034
[51] https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/regional-infrastructure-summit-chathams

community engagement and an island-wide vision. For this 4-year period the Strategy is focussed on renewable energy, a shipping solution, drinking water and housing development. The Minister of Regional Development noted the infrastructure deficit on the islands during a recent visit and as an effective regional entity the Council can apply to the Regional Infrastructure Fund to advance the infrastructure strategy[52].

4.4.1 Water services

Waste disposal and three waters (drinking water, stormwater and wastewater) are concerns identified in the Long-Term Plan. The Plan notes that historically infrastructure has advanced when there is government capital available. However, the Council notes that "Recently, we have been unsuccessful in securing funding for necessary upgrades to our three waters infrastructure. This means our three water assets have deteriorated further" (CIC 2024, p 9). These issues are evident in Waitangi/Te One where the system is described as "at the end of its useful life" and building new houses or accommodation is restricted by the lack of water and wastewater infrastructure, with further issues in the small communities of Owenga and Kaingaroa.

The Council has developed an investment plan for solid waste and three waters and have established a working relationship with Auckland Council for the technical support to address these issues. The Council has decided to pursue an "in-house delivery model with expert support" in response to a new water services delivery model. This means the Council will retain responsibility for water services with technical support from providers such as Watercare (Auckland Council's CCO). Meanwhile, further developments of housing, accommodation and businesses in Waitangi will remain constrained.

4.4.2 Wharves, harbours and shipping

The CIET, as current provider of shipping services, has vigorously promoted the need for a much improved shipping service, an issue widely discussed by residents, farmers and businesses. This issue is a well canvassed discussion not reiterated here. Declining reliability of the service due to the ageing vessel has considerable economic and social impacts. Past reports show that shipping requires a single operator with a suitable vessel (Taylor Baines 2008). Following lengthy discussions with the Government and submissions from the community a replacement for the *Southern Tiare* is expected to be built and operational by late 2027. A joint venture will then operate the new vessel[53].

Sufficient harbours, wharves and barge facilities are required for an efficient, cost-effective shipping service as well as to support fishing, cruise ships and charter vessels. The main wharf facilities at Waitangi are the subject of different designs and upgrades going back many years with a seemingly endless call for capital funding (Arbuckle 1971; Taylor Baines 2008). Finally, this shortfall was recognised in a major, government funded, reconstruction of the Waitangi breakwater, wharf and port facilities completed in 2018. This wharf remains crucial to the economy and livelihoods of the Chathams (Thomas 2018) and to development projects such as PFC, who will need to offload key materials such as fencing, equipment or hazardous materials.

In addition, there are important local wharves at Owenga, Kaingaroa, Port Hutt and Flower Pot (Pitt Island). These all require upgrading and maintenance. For example, the CIET recently

[52] https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/regional-infrastructure-summit-chathams

[53] https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-chatham-islands-ship-confirmed

installed a new fuel tank and pipeline at Kaingaroa Wharf, and Owenga and Flower Pot have had upgrades to their barge facilities. Owenga is the usual base for moving people and products to Pitt Island on fishing vessels, supplementing the main but irregular shipping service.

4.4.3 Airport and air services

Air services to the Chathams are fundamental to development and social-economic conditions but proved difficult to establish, initially with flying boats and then a dirt strip at Hāpūpū. Services to this isolated location were expensive and required increasing government subsidies (Arbuckle 1971). After the 1990 economic review the fledgling Air Chathams service began to expand into a private, cost effective, single operator for freight and passengers. The airline grew from local charter flights for passengers and freight to Pitt Island to Air Chathams in 1984, owned by the Emery family. The commercial viability of the airline is evident in their ability to replace the Convair workhorses they operated for many years with the ATRs used today. Destinations, frequency, reliability and capacity for freight and passengers are well recognised factors fundamental to the island economy (see also Taylor Baines 2008), with four flights per week servicing Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. Onwards connections are provided by Air Chathams to a few destinations and a new interline partnership will make onwards travel with AirNZ a better-connected journey.[54]

The main Chatham Island's Inia William Tuuta Memorial Airport was built on Chatham Island in the late 1980s with the old runway at Hāpūpū no longer suitable for modern aircraft. The new airport, sited on land adjoining Te Whanga lagoon, is much more accessible by road but has required upgrades over time in the form of sealing, lights, navigational equipment and, most recently, a new terminal. After calls for capital going back to 2008 the $45m runway extension and upgrades project was completed in early 2024 utilising Covid-19 recovery funding. It can now take jet aircraft, host night landings, operate in wider weather conditions and is more suitable for passenger and freight services. The new terminal is much more suitable for an expanding passenger throughput as visitor numbers increase as well as enabling security screening for possible jet flights in the future. Passenger numbers in the 12 months to April 2025 were 11,738 compared to 10,000 in 2016. In recent years flight landings (Table 7 below) were higher in the two years that cover the peak in tourism numbers (Figure 8 above) – 30 June 2021 to 30 June 2023 – then decreasing in the last two years.

Table 7: Landing at Chathams Airport

Year to	30 June 22	30 June 23	30 June 24	30 June 25
Total landings	346	375	321	314
Non-Air Chathams flights	24	26	14	25

Sourced from CIET Annual Reports[55]

Flights to Pitt Island for passengers or freight are available on demand (when weather and pilot availability allows) using a Cessna aircraft. The grass airstrip is available subject to weather conditions and delays are common.

4.4.4 Electricity supplies

Electricity until very recently was supplied by the diesel generators of the Chatham Islands Electricity Company owned by CIET. Remote households, including all of Pitt Island, have their own generators. There are small micro hydro plants, and solar panels on some properties. The

[54] https://www.airchathams.co.nz/blog/air-chathams-air-new-zealand-interline-announcement
[55] https://www.chathamislandsenterprisetrust.com/resources

cost of power is a long-standing issue with the high costs of electricity noted as an obstacle to residents and businesses (Taylor Baines 2008) and energy as a major part of the cost of living with a retail price close to double that in New Zealand (Martin Jenkins 2017).

Hydro power and wind energy have been investigated for some time. These alternatives proceeded to the first wind turbines, which were never fully installed and now lie as waste. The successful installation of three new renewable wind energy turbines was completed with $11m government funding and commissioned in September 2025. These turbines and battery, working in conjunction with the main diesel plant has seen the electricity price drop from $1.29 per kw/h to $0.89 per kw/h for people on the main grid, relieving some of the cost-of-living burden.

Fuel supplies are all imported so the turbines should reduce approximately 70% of diesel use and reliance on shipping and fuel storage[56]. They also provide the opportunity for greater use of electric vehicles and equipment and add to the Chathams sustainability profile.

4.4.5 Solid and hazardous waste

The current waste management plan is a secure landfill at Owenga and transfer stations at Kaingaroa and Te One. There is an emphasis on reuse and recycling, which covers key materials such as glass, plastics and carboard that are bailed up and exported. The infamous old landfill near Te One closed in 2019 and is being planted in natives. There is at times a stockpile of metal for recycling and unmanageable waste such as hazardous substances. People note there is a continuing issue with casual dumping and poor disposal and concern about any increase in littering although bylaws are now in place. Another issue is the observation of rats entering rubbish bins, including at the Kaingaroa transfer station. Visitors are encouraged to manage waste and the visitor levy is available to help with rubbish bins at key locations.

4.4.6 Roads and communications

The development of a road network on Chatham Island is a long-standing issue in terms of capital and operational funding, with roads seen as essential to social and economic development, including agriculture, fish processing and freighting, tourism and access to schools and health services, as well as for social connection. Since WWII various efforts were made to build and upgrade roads (Arbuckle 1971; Rennie 2022) but unfortunately in fits and starts.

The road programme current average annual spend is $4.46 million with funding from Waka Kotahi NZTA and rates. This programme includes bridge replacements and improved village roads. Stantec provide engineering support and Fulton Hogan provide ongoing maintenance from their deport in Waitangi. Recently a road upgrade programme was completed on Pitt Island[57].

Telecommunications are essential to social connection, administration and business activity. There was a major upgrade under the Crown's rural connectivity project that installed a 4G mobile network and an improved satellite link in December 2021. There is now wide access to mobile services and wireless for households and businesses. Residents connect on island and

[56] https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/579994/chatham-island-wind-farm-to-slash-power-prices-cut-carbon-emissions

[57] CIC newsletter 1 May 2025; https://www.cic.govt.nz/your-council/news-and-events/2021/what-do-i-get-for-my-rates-roading

to children at high school and hunau / whanau across New Zealand. Services also enable much improved contact with agencies, technical support organisations and individuals, and upgrade business activity such as fish sales, visitor bookings, banking and administration. Residents commonly shop online and freight supplies to the Chathams. In short, telecommunications reduce previous isolation, increase the attractiveness of life on the islands, and support the visitor sector. The PFC project uses internet in multiple ways for communicating on and off island. They have an active Facebook page and website, obtain technical information and funding opportunities online and access practical experiences on predator control from other jurisdictions.

Community news is an important part of community communications. Until November 2025 Community Focus Trust were putting out a weekly ENews with notices for the community. Having lost funding earlier this year, the Community Focus Trust have passed the weekly newsletter to CIC who will now collate the weekly news. CIC also have their own newsletter, as do other groups. Groups also use social media to share local events and news.

4.5 Social services

4.5.1 Education

Education in the Chathams consists of three primary schools (years 1 to 8) and no high school or tertiary education. The only formal early childhood education option on the island is Te Kōhanga Reo o Wharekauri in Te One, opposite Te One School. The Kohanga Reo caters for up to 24 children, including up to 8 tamĭriki / tamariki aged under 2 years[58]. Instruction is in Te Reo Māori; however, the centre is used to catering to Tamariki coming into the centre speaking only English and supports these tamĭriki / tamariki to develop their Te Reo skills over time. Previously a playgroup ran at Te One (Lawrie & Powell 2017) but has not been active for some years now. Currently the Kōhanga is over-subscribed and does not suit all needs. A 2024 survey found approximately 50 tamĭriki / tamariki under 5 on the island, including 22 families requiring ECE hours. Therefore, work has commenced on developing another early childhood centre option and other activities.

The primary schools are Te One School, Kaingaroa School, and Pitt Island School. There was previously a primary school at Owenga, with 2001 the last year pupils enrolled at the school (see Figure 9) and the school officially closing in 2003[59]. Variations in enrolments are common, but overall, the primary school enrolments across the Chathams have dropped since 2000, a small increase with a peak in 2016, then falling to a low point in 2022. Since 2022 numbers have been increasing. Currently Te One School reports it is running near replacement levels with 55 students on the roll in 2025. The long-term drop in school enrolments is consistent with the reduction in school aged children in the population (see Section 4.1). Kaingaroa School dropped to a roll of two in 2024 compared to a high of 12 in 2015 and 2016. It has since recovered and had six students in September 2025 with new entrants expected in 2026. Pitt Island School has also fluctuated over the years with seven pupils in 2024 increasing to 11 in 2025.

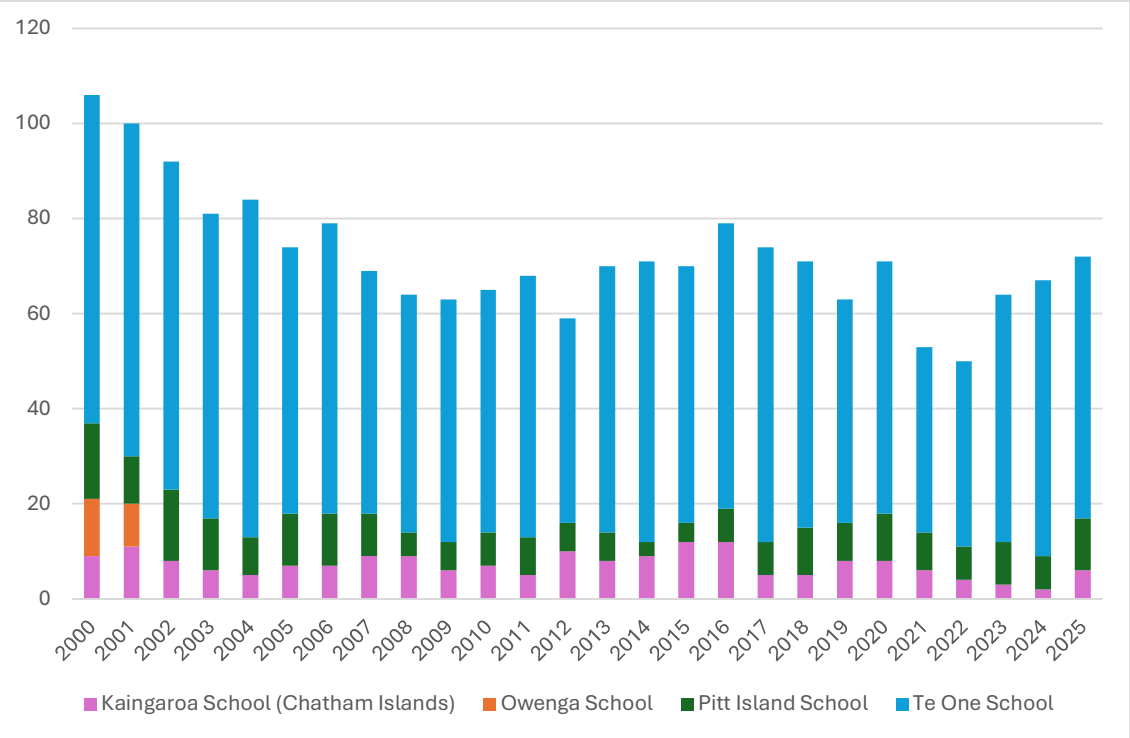
For high school, students must study through Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (correspondence school) or attend a boarding school in the North or South Islands. For many years, boys have been able to attend Christchurch Boys High School as in-zone students, but the Chathams is no

[58] www.educationcounts.govt.nz/find-an-els/els/profile-and-contact-details?area=597000&district=67&ece=70602&region=19
[59] https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2003-go2218

longer in zone. From 2018, the Christchurch Girls High School's zone has covered the Chathams[60]. Families have to apply for boarding school places to guarantee attendance at high school, or they opt to move to New Zealand for high school years. Families are eligible for an MOE grant for boarding school costs, but it generally covers 50% or less of the boarding fees. CIET and other Chathams organisations also provide education grants. There are also some subsidies for flights, but these are also not sufficient to fully cover travel costs. Finally, students must fly on the scheduled Air Chathams flights and this can mean they miss up to a week of school per term if they do not have a local place to stay between the boarding house closing or opening and the day of the flight. Locals estimated there were around 30 high school students currently.

There is very limited tertiary education on the Chathams. In-service training depends on the availability of trainers and funding, usually on an *ad hoc* basis. For example, we observed a training programme for civil defence personnel on the island. Chathams agencies including CIET and CIC work together to bring specific training courses to the island including skipper and forklift driving training. Some training is attached to particular programmes. For example, the One Billion Trees programme provided training in native tree nursery work through a SCION led project that includes seeding and propagation of endemic plant species. DOC provides conservation volunteers with field-based training in conservation work. The available internet provides access for individuals to do on-line, off-island courses as provided by the Open Polytech and many university courses.

Figure 9: School rolls 2000 to 2024 as of 1 July



[60] https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/92872448/christchurch-girls-high-school-zone-expanded-to-match-boys-highs

4.5.2 Housing

Housing was identified during our field research as a potential constraint on projects such as PFC that want to bring in external expertise or contractors. The 2013 Census shows that 53.9% of Chatham Islands households own their dwelling or hold it in a family trust, compared with 64.8% of households nationwide. The 2023 Census found this difference was still there but had closed, with 61.3% of households who own their own home versus 66.0% for New Zealand[61]. In 2023 there was a total of 366 private dwellings on the Chathams.

Of those dwellings that were rented, 73.7% were owned by a private person, trust or business, 5.3% were owned by a local authority, and 21.1% were owned by another state-owned corporation, or government department. No dwellings in the Chatham Islands are owned by Housing New Zealand (Martin Jenkins 2017). CIET, HMT and NMW all own houses both for workers and the community and several Government Departments own houses for workers.

Although the proportion of households renting is high, the median rent in 2023 was just $150 versus $450 for New Zealand as a whole. While rents are cheaper, there is a shortage of available houses (Lawrie & Powell 2017). There is also the possibility that there are households living in houses with low or no rent including those supplied by employers and by relatives. Nonetheless, people commented that the availability of housing is low and can be a problem for families wanting to return to the islands to live. One person pointed out houses are usually linked to a family, organisation or business. So, housing becomes available when there is a shift in employment necessitating a house shift. Some employers have their own housing. For example, DOC has houses at Te One that are at times empty now local staff numbers are reduced but they are used for visiting staff or contractors. Otherwise, employers wanting to bring workers to the islands for projects, and especially for seasonal work, need to find or build houses. One employer indicated they prefer to use local staff otherwise they need to find housing for migrant workers. Another employer indicated they would need to build houses if they brought workers in.

An important constraint to building new houses is the low availability of land and the costs of building materials and freighting them to the islands. This issue has remained over many years during which there were various initiatives to build public housing (Taylor Baines 2002, 2008). More recently the Chatham Islands Housing Partnership was formed by CIC, CIET, HMT and NMW to find solutions. They had $2m of government funding to start with[62]. Iwi are involved in addressing housing shortages by utilising funding from agencies such as Te Puni Kōkiri, who facilitate and fund papakāinga houses. Five new homes were built as a model project from 2021, by working with the partnership and additional funds from CIET[63]. The homes are built on land that the CIET provided and utilise a rent to own approach. Despite these efforts our interviews revealed housing problems are a continuing constraint on economic development projects. Affordability of housing relates to the cost of housing verses household incomes. However, as discussed below, incomes are relatively good, leaving availability as the main underlying problem.

4.5.3 Incomes and cost of living

Incomes in the Chathams are relatively high. To consider incomes over time and between groups in the population it is useful to use median incomes (Table 8). These data show that over

[61] https://tools.summaries.stats.govt.nz/places/SA3/chatham-islands#dwelling-occupancy
[62] https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/2m-chatham-islands-housing
[63] https://www.mpamag.com/nz/news/general/government-launches-papakainga-housing-project/306625

time (2013–2023) incomes are relatively high compared to the rest of New Zealand, especially in the 15–29 age group. Incomes are much the same in the 30–64 age group but appear higher again in the 65 plus age group and increasing over time. Higher incomes in the 15–29 age group may reflect that on the Chathams, these young people are most likely to be in employment not study, while in New Zealand a higher proportion of this age group would be studying.

Table 8: Median personal income ($) of population, by age, Chatham Islands and New Zealand, 2013–2023 Censuses for residents aged 15 plus

	CI 2013	NZ 2013	CI 2018	NZ 2018	CI 2023	NZ 2023
15–29 years	$23,600	$12,600	$27,800	$17,200	$37,600	$25,000
30–64 years	$39,100	$39,600	$45,000	$45,300	$53,100	$57,900
65 years and over	$21,100	$20,900	$23,800	$22,500	$29,200	$26,600

While individual incomes are higher than New Zealand on average, the small population and island living means the cost of living is also much higher (Lawrie & Powell 2017). People comment frequently on the costs of living on islands where costs of imported items such as food and building materials, vehicles and fuel all have the added costs of freight. These additional costs are found at the local stores but also must be added to all goods imported from New Zealand. Freight costs are incurred through sea and air freight, with both being incurred by households. There is also the added cost of travel to New Zealand with airfares needed to cover travel to health services, tangi and whanau occasions or cultural events.

Petrol and diesel are shipped to the island with prices up to 1.6 times the average cost across the rest of New Zealand. Some key stores have allowed affordable freight charges, particularly the Warehouse and Woolworths with both being used to freight in groceries and key supplies. While the Warehouse was one of the key major stores that classified the Chathams as rural delivery, this was changed in October 2025 and will have a significant impact on locals accessing affordable dry goods.

4.5.4 Health and community services

The Chatham Islands Health Centre provides GP and urgent care services, including urgent pharmacy scripts[64]. Medical emergencies are evacuated to New Zealand via air ambulance. The St Johns Ambulance service is staffed by volunteers (Lawrie & Powell 2017; pers. comm.). Visitors commonly use these health services. There is one police officer and the fire service is provided by volunteers. The recent reduction in DOC staff on the island means they no longer provide DOC rural fire support.

Library services are provided by a small library at the Council building, supported by Wellington City Library[65]. Both Te One and Kaingaroa Schools have swimming pools that can be accessed by the public as well as playgrounds. Other sports are held at The Den including netball and basketball. The Heartlands Office provides services and information on a range of Government social services (Lawrie & Powell 2017). Community Focus Trust used to provide further social services and the weekly newsletter but has been wound up after losing funding.

There are two shops on the island – both in Waitangi. The 'Top Shop' also now provides a small café service with coffee and some ready to go food such as pies. In Waitangi, The Hotel also has

[64] https://info.health.nz/hospitals-services/hospitals/canterbury/chatham-islands-health-centre
[65] https://www.cic.govt.nz/services/community-and-culture/library-services

a bar, restaurant and operates as a café during the day. Densdays are highly popular – open for lunch on Wednesdays and also a common community meeting point. Over summer there is an intermittent café – River Onion Café – that has a strong reputation. In Kaingaroa the local club sells bar food and drinks several times a week, but guests must be members or accompanied by a member.

Chatham Island Albatrosses. Photo by: Dave Boyle

Section C: Assessment and recommendations

5 Issues and impacts - community views

In this section we discuss community views on the issues and impacts of the predator free goal, current strategy and specific actions including animals affected, and views on methods of eradication and suppression. We also discuss how PFC will affect the wider social-economic environment and development issues faced by the community. As one person put it, the goal of a predator free Chatham Islands is intellectually wonderful, but the reality is that day to day life in the Chathams is focused on survival. We ask how PFC can contribute in the longer term to social and economic resilience alongside increased environmental sustainability.

There is widespread support across the community for the goal of a Predator Free Chatham Islands, for the work of the CILRT and for the individuals involved in that work. While there were some questions about the feasibility of eradicating predators from the whole island, particularly rats, everyone we spoke to was generally positive and supportive of the project. Individuals could see the benefits to the environment, particularly the visible and further regeneration of the bush and an increase in birdlife. They also saw direct benefits for the island economy, daily life and local communities: “awesome…community vege garden wouldn’t be affected [anymore]” and “the school rat won’t eat the copier anymore”.

5.1 The Landscape Restoration Trust

The CILRT is widely supported and recognised as a local group leading the work towards a Predator Free Chatham Islands. We found widespread respect and support specifically for the Project Coordinator, who was recognised as “a good man” who wants the best for the Chathams. Having a local with excellent reputation and connections across the island community in the role of project lead is important for the success of this project and essential to a community-based programme.

As with many charitable organisations, person power and funding are key concerns. Ongoing, consistent and sustainable funding for the CILRT was raised by trustees, other organisations and the general community. Being able to expand and have more person power is a necessary requirement to achieve the goals of a Predator Free Chatham Islands that relies on securing reliable and additional funding streams for the Trust. Currently, the CILRT is funded through grants and minor donations, and is expanding into other partnerships. There has been a push for donations to fund the AT220 traps being deployed into the northeast area especially to key tourist groups, such as one cruise ship visit donating funding for around 30 traps. However, a key priority is to build funds to ensure sustainable, baseline funding of existing staff, and then enable the ability to expand the number of people employed by the Trust along with volunteers. There are many potential funding streams identified during our conversations including via tourism, providing predator control on carbon-farmed land, and bidding for contracts with DOC and other organisations in the conservation space e.g. planting and predator control on private and covenant land.

Private sector relationships are another source of funding for PFC. For example, Air Chathams provide an opportunity to pay an environmental contribution as an offset when purchasing airfares. Tourism operators can also provide support for PFC as part of their community contributions, plus explain and encourage payment of the voluntary visitor levy with information handouts or a QR code, and offer an opportunity for individuals and groups to support PFC

directly such as sponsoring an auto predator trap with chip protection for pets (costs up to $1000). Another is specific giving campaigns e.g. Tāngaro Tuia te Ora (Endangered Species Foundation) who currently offer the opportunity to "gift a shag" to purchase help for the highly endangered Chatham Islands shag[66] or any other ecologically focussed merchandising charity.

Communication with the community is a critical part of ensuing the ongoing buy-in and support for the project by the wider public. Many people recognised the work of the Communications Coordinator to build a Facebook profile for the CILRT and enjoyed the regular posts as a way to stay updated on the PFC project. All the existing communication work should continue, but there were also some people that do not follow Facebook and had other questions about what is happening in the project. They suggested more public meetings or physical hard copy updates about what is happening with the project. Regular contributions to the weekly Chathams newsletter as well as the CILRT's own electronic newsletter are also important.

5.2 Phasing the project and connecting conservation efforts

The CILRT is currently focusing on the northeast corner of Chatham Island (see phase 1 in Figure 2) along with supporting individuals across the island with at home traps. Alongside their work, there are several individual and larger projects in the conservation space across the Chathams (see Figure 3), some that have been active for a number of years. In our interviews, we discussed the focus of the CILRT, whether it was the right focus, what other people are doing and how that connects to the broader PFC goal.

5.2.1 The northeast phase

Across all our interviews there was a general understanding of why the CILRT was focusing on the northeast area and support for this as a starting area. People were generally aware that it had narrow isthmuses that would enable barriers to be created to prevent the reinvasion of predators. Looking forward, the community was keen to see the restoration of the area and the reintroduction of species, either through natural spread or translocations.

Within the northeast area, a substantial amount of the land, likely upwards of 90%, is now owned or leased by HMT (a founding partner of CILRT). Having such a substantial amount of the first phase area under the control of a single organisation is extremely helpful to the next steps and success of the northeast phase as it means HMT and CILRT can work together on the landscape scale work needed to eradicate possums, feral cats and rats from this area. For example, HMT is undertaking cat live-trapping. Funding for the conservation ranger was sourced from DOC and while HMT hope to get further funding to continue this work, HMT value the project and are likely to continue the project with objectives dependent on funding. Along with cats, the trapping work has caught weka and possums. The Kaingaroa community are fully aware of the work and have a relationship with the HMT ranger to ensure domestic cats are released from traps.

5.2.2 Integration of pest control projects

As outlined in section 3.4, there are individuals and groups undertaking conservation activities. While these projects are not part of the CILRT work, they contribute to the wider goal of a predator free and restored Chatham Islands. Other individuals noted they would like to do more,

[66] https://www.endangeredspecies.org.nz/gift-a-shag

but the key barriers were not having enough resources e.g. traps, funds to undertake stock fencing, or time and/or skills to undertake pest control.

Some of the current projects, including CILRT's work, are uploaded on TrapNZ. But not all the predator control work occurring across the Chathams is recorded as it relies on each individual or group to upload their work. In addition, the mapping system means that it is hard to visualize the full extent of the work on the Chathams – see Figure 10. As such, there could be further work to clearly map the projects on the island and enable collaboration across work undertaken. CILRT could look at how it wants to operate and support individuals to undertake conservation work on their land, either through providing advice, connections, physical resources or funding. Becoming more active across the Chathams would also reduce the risk that CILRT is seen as operating solely in the northeast area and forgetting other key parts of the island, particularly in the southeast and southwest.

Figure 10: TrapNZ Chatham Islands predator control work (Pitt Island inset)

5.2.3 Restoration and translocation

There was a clear understanding across the Chathams that predator control is a step to further restoration of the islands and translocation of species. The recent work on planting, funded through One Billion Trees and Jobs for Nature, as well as longer term planting and habitat restoration work by private trusts, individuals, imi and iwi has shown what can be achieved in the Chathams. Everyone saw restoration plantings as being necessary alongside predator control. The role of planting and habitat restoration is discussed in more detail below in section 5.7.

Translocations of species is well known on the Chathams, with the most famous translocation being the black robin from Little Mangere to Mangere Island in 1976, and later to South East Island. Today, major translocations include a 5-year translocation of hakoakoa / tītī to Kaingaroa by HMT – using their cultural harvest under Treaty settlement. The first chicks were moved in 2025 and a further 50 chicks will be translocated each year until 2029. The intent was to establish a new colony, however, when the translocation occurred they found up to 40 burrows already inhabited by birds. The Taiko Trust is also part way through a hakoakoa / tītī translocation with five seasons of chick translocations occurring over a wider timeframe, the most recent in Autumn 2025.

Natural spread is an ongoing impact of reduced predators and better food sources, with more or new local sightings of: kōkō / tūī in Waitangi and Te One and north to past Te Henga, and breeding in Kaingaroa; parakeets in Waitangi; pārēā / parea in Big Bush through to north of Te Henga to Chudleigh; and tchitake / pīwakawaka in Kaingaroa. The general direction of natural spread of birdlife was widely observed to be from the southwest northwards through the narrow necks either side of Te Wanga lagoon. Due to predation, natural spread is often curtailed but anecdotal observations and increasing ecological monitoring shows natural spread will continue into areas where the risk of being preyed upon has reduced and food sources provide sufficient habitat for these species.

Going forwards, HMT are considering developing a long-term translocation plan including warblers, pārēā / parea and kōkō / tūī. The northeast phase is considered a potential location for both kōkō / tūī and pārēā / parea, as well as warbler, tomtit and parakeets. While there was support and interest in the return of birdlife both with natural dispersal and translocations, there were few strong opinions about which species were translocated, with a general positive view to seeing birdlife recover across the Chathams.

Comments suggest translocations are a fantastic way to engage the community, educating them on native species and on the effects of predator control and other support needed to protect birdlife. For example, in Kaingaroa the community and the school were invited to feeding of the relocated hakoakoa / tītī chicks. By involving school children in opportunities like feeding the hakoakoa / tītī, the youngest generation gains an understanding of conservation, which further builds the community support and involvement in a predator free and restored Chatham Islands. Involving children also naturally engages the wider hunau / whanau in conservation of these species.

Harvesting of species was raised on occasion. HMT have turned their cultural harvest into translocation to protect the species, and because they can currently buy hakoakoa / tītī from New Zealand iwi at an affordable price. As numbers improve, then sustainable cultural harvest is possible. Individual islanders indicated that harvesting of black backed gull chicks and swan eggs has occurred.

5.3 Toxins

Toxin use, especially aerial toxins, is a sensitive subject for all communities on the Chathams with the potential to cause community conflicts over their use. There was some hesitancy about the use of toxins, especially for aerial distribution. Others were more sanguine about use of toxins, including ground baiting and aerial distribution. When we asked people what their concerns about aerial toxin distribution were, and what questions they would like to discuss with an expert, they were open to having a more detailed conversation about the use of toxins in predator control to achieve an island-wide goal of eradication. Some are already open to aerial distribution of toxins when used for the long-term goal of a predator free Chathams, pointing out that there are areas of the islands where this will be the only sensible approach.

The key concerns about toxins were their impacts on the broader environment, especially water, how long it lasts in the environment, and the risk of adverse impacts on non-target animals such as dogs and birds – these reflect the common concerns for residents on other inhabited islands where toxin is proposed (see section 3.6.1). The concern about the environment was high, with key questions around what happens to the poison when it lies uneaten on the soil, what happens when it rains, what happens when it gets into the water ways, and whether they poison

the land, water, wider environment and human health. The answers to these questions vary depending on poison type, and methods, but there is significant information on the impacts of toxins and how long they last in the environment. In proposing to use any toxin as part of the wider PFC project it will be important to bring in a toxin expert and sit down with the community to answer their questions.

To date, there has not been widespread use of toxin in the Chatham Islands and, as such, people do not have much knowledge or experience with toxins. This increases the risk of misinformation and gossip behind uninformed facts. It is also very difficult to discuss hypothetical situations as each toxin has a different distribution method, half-life, impact on soils and water, and risk of non-target poisoning. As such, further conversations around toxin use should be based on actual proposals. These proposals could include options e.g. two different poison types or two different distribution methods. This way the community can consider the different risks, benefits and costs, and compare toxin and non-toxin approaches. Communications need to be clear, simple, and use different methods of gaining community views, as we observed that public conversations are dominated by strong personalities and opinions, which may not reflect the views of everyone in the room. Most people recognise that there are negative effects of poison, and as such recommend that experts are clear and transparent about the adverse effects of poison and what can be expected. Building community trust through honest and transparent communications on toxins will be key.

Ground-based toxin use is more likely to get community buy-in, with some people specifically stating that they would be okay with ground-based toxin use but not aerial. Some also noted that many already use toxin at home e.g. baits in the ceiling. HMT have been using bait stations on the land they are farming around Kaingaroa and no one has raised any concerns.

Along with some people concerned about aerial use over ground-based toxin, there were a few people who did not want to see any toxin use. However, many people also questioned whether PFC would be feasible without toxin use, especially in larger areas such as the southern part of Chatham Island. One of the major issues with aerial toxin use is on farmed land and the need to remove or stand-down stock. Some of the farmers we spoke to would be open to de-stocking for an aerial operation if it was a one-off event and the long-term benefit was rat eradication from the island.

5.4 How animals should be treated under PFC

5.4.1 Possums

Possums were widely considered a pest and there was support for their eradication from the Chathams. While there may have been some fur trade in the past, there is currently no economic activity associated with possums. People noted that possums needed to be killed for the birds and insects and wider environmental benefit. They were also identified as a destructive pest on farms, getting into crops, sileage, and nurseries. This suggests that removing possums will have a positive impact on social wellbeing as well as a direct economic benefit to farmers, gardens and nurseries from reduced damage.

In the northeast, 942 possums have been removed by the CILRT and the mean number of possums caught per trap decreased in Autumn 2025. When talking to people in the community, possums were not mentioned by people living in the northeast area, whereas elsewhere, especially in the south, possums were raised as a major pest problem. Combining the reduction in mean possums caught with the anecdotal evidence, it appears that possum control in the

northeast area is proving effective and starting to have a demonstratable impact on possum numbers. Although ecologically, the south is more forested and will likely have higher density of possums, which may also affect locals' different experiences.

5.4.2 Cats

Feral cats were widely considered a pest and recognised as a significant predator of native species. While there is strong support for removal of feral cats, domestic cats are common and the community wants to keep domestic cats. Feral cat trapping, primarily live traps, is or has been active in places, including the northeast area, Taupeka Point, near Chatham Island oyster catcher (*Haematopus chathamensis*) breeding zones and on Pitt Island. There is wide support for trapping methods and comfort with shooting feral cats. Many people on the Chathams noted that they, or neighbours, shaved cats' tails to identify them as a domestic cat when cat trapping was occurring. Trappers use this identifier and knowledge of local cats to ensure domestic cats are released and no one reported issues of domestic cats disappearing.

A collaborative desexing programme between CILRT, CIC and DOC, recently fully subsidised by CILRT, has been very well received with many people indicating they had their cat desexed due to the programme. Everyone was supportive of these initiatives and noted that there were fewer cat fights due to desexing, and many were very glad to no longer have to deal with kitten litters. Several people reported that there are places where kittens get dumped, creating first generation feral cats in the environment and requiring constant removal of feral cats to continue feral cat suppression.

While some people raised further initiatives such as microchipping or encouraging people to have bells on their cats, these methods did not seem to be widespread and there was some hesitation around microchipping. While a by-law to require desexing of domestic cats would likely have support, further initiatives such as compulsory microchipping or control would need further discussions to understand views. Some people also raised whether there should be a limit on the number of cats per household as some households are known to have up to 10 cats.

The primary reason people reported having cats was to control rats and mice. Some people noted that if rodents were eradicated, then they may no longer keep a cat. Alternatively, some people suggested that having other rat and mouse control methods that people did not need to think about or did not take much effort may also enable households to reduce the number of domestic cats that they kept.

Pitt Island

Due to timing and transport issues, one of the limitations of this report is a lack of interviews with people living on Pitt Island. From people we spoke to that were connected to Pitt Island, either through family members or having lived there as a child, we heard that there is support from the Pitt Island community for the cat trapping project and for eradicating feral cats. One of the reasons the control project was a success was that most families on Pitt were involved in some manner and this meant additional income for households to supplement other income streams such as farming and fishing. It was noted that as of June 2024 all domestic cats on the island were neutered, but since then feral kittens may have been adopted.

While further discussions are needed, the people we spoke to considered that the community would be mostly supportive of a feral cat eradication. Funding is required to complete a detailed implementation plan and to have a conversation with the community about the actual proposal including methods. Any project proposal should consider how the community can benefit on a

social level such as through employment to do live cat trapping and preparation work for expert hunters or providing board or food to experts coming to work on the island. Having a point person for the project who is respected and connected to the local community would also be important for the project's success. The work to remove cats should also be part of a broader restoration plan and developing projects that can provide ongoing conservation related income e.g. restoration planting or tourism activities on Pitt Island.

5.4.3 Rats and mice

Rats are widely considered a problem across the Chathams. Many people spoke of the issues that rats cause to the community such as getting into rubbish, destroying school resources and property at both Kaingaroa and Te One Schools, causing health and safety issues at schools, and damaging vehicles: "my truck got buggered". There was also an understanding of the impact rats have on native wildlife. While mice were not particularly mentioned in interviews, when raised there was support to eradicate mice if it was possible. Although we note that the presence of rats will suppress mice making them less visible. While it was hard to conceptualise, individuals could see the benefit of not having rats and there would be a number of direct benefits from reduced damage as identified on other islands (see section 3.6.1). Many individuals noted they undertook rat and mice control and there would be a direct saving from not having to continue control following eradication.

While the removal of rats and mice from the Chathams is supported by the community, there were many questions about whether it was feasible and what methods would be used. Many people were aware that rat control would likely require poison use and potentially aerial toxin distribution and views on these methods are discussed in more detail in section 5.3.

5.4.4 Pigs

Pigs are a major issue on Chatham Island with most people raising concerns about feral pigs and their impacts. Noone was aware of any pig farming that is occurring on the Chathams, meaning all pigs are considered feral. There were two key issues people raised that may have contributed to an increase in pig numbers. The first was the reduction in hunting. While pigs are still hunted, mostly for recreation, there was a general sense that most did not consider pigs a key food source and less hunting is occurring. Hunters today want to be able to hunt pigs more easily – e.g. preferring to take a 4-wheeler rather than walk into more remote locations or monitoring their dogs with GPS from a vehicle and only going in when there were signs the dogs had found a pig. There is also an annual pig hunting competition which is a major, family-friendly, community event using traditional hunting methods with dogs and knives[67].

The second issue was that following the 2024 MPI cull of feral cattle across the main Chatham Island (see section 5.4.6), the carcases were left in-situ. Some people theorized that the carcasses became food for feral pigs and caused a sudden increase in feral pig numbers. However, there have been no detailed studies of the feral pig population.

Some people consider that pigs should be eradicated, but most people are not ready for feral pigs to be completely removed. Some individual landowners are trialling new types of traps, including remote controlled traps, that can be used to capture a family of pigs. One type of trap

[67] see https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/6339/ for a description of this competition "Little wonder that the islanders look to the wild and see a larder. Eels, whitebait, weka and wild pork are the tokens of a relationship we all once had with Nature, a life we all lived."

has been successfully trialled on Banks Peninsula, Canterbury, as part of feral pig elimination[68] and testing is underway to see how it performs in the Chathams.

Feral pigs can cause major negative impacts to native species and further discussions are needed on a coordinated management plan for feral pigs, and whether feral pigs should be excluded from areas of high conservation value in the Chathams. While feral pigs were excluded from the original CILRT strategy, there may be scope to include control of pigs in future strategies.

5.4.5 Weka

Weka are a cultural icon to Chatham Islanders, who identify themselves as 'weka' as opposed to being 'kiwis' like New Zealanders. While everyone is aware these are an introduced species in the Chathams, everyone considers weka are an important part of the Chathams identity, and a traditional form of recreation and food gathering.

Weka. Source: CILRT

There was general agreement amongst those we spoke to that weka hunting has significantly reduced, partially due to generational change. Weka are not considered a food source and most people agreed only a handful of families are regularly hunting weka. Others indicated it was still a fun activity to do with children at the weekend or holidays but was primarily a recreational or traditional activity pursuit rather than a food-gathering priority. Some did note that as seabirds such as black-backed gulls, hakoakoa / tītī, tāiko grow in numbers and there are more available for eating then weka would no longer be needed for cultural harvest and that might change the conversation around how weka are valued.

People recognised the effects of weka on the environment, including reporting that they will attack taiko in burrows, and that weka have a clear impact on snails, grubs and other insects. On Pitt Island, weka were only introduced in the 1970s and those that grew up on Pitt noted that there has been a reduction since then in the number of native skinks, which are now very difficult to find. There may be scope for further discussions with the community on how to protect key native species that are at risk of attack by weka or their role on Pitt Island.

While no longer an important food-source or major hunting target, due to the cultural identity there was strong support for retaining weka on the Chathams and concern about them being affected by predator control methods. The effects of any predator control on weka needs to be clearly and transparently communicated and discussed with the community.

5.4.6 Feral cattle, sheep, horses and goats

There is widespread concern about the number of feral cattle, and to a lesser extent feral sheep, horses and goats, across the Chathams. There is a history of unwanted animals being released on the island and turning into feral herds, with many people able to identify who originally released goats, or dairy cows, or horses, usually due to stopping a farming operation. So rather than dealing with the remaining animals they were simply released to wander, becoming feral

[68] https://pestfreebankspeninsula.org.nz/take-action/feral-pig-elimination-programme/

herds. Even today, the community believe that farmers unable to deal with high stock numbers are releasing sheep and cattle rather than making the decision to cull stock on the farm.

Another driver for feral stock issues is fencing and fence conditions. While CIC has regulations stating that all roadsides need to be fenced, they do not have the resources to enforce the fencing by-law. Fencing is very expensive in the Chathams, often considered up to three times as expensive as mainland New Zealand, and is often damaged by feral stock. As a result, the existence, and standard of fencing is inconsistent.

Feral cattle are considered the most significant feral stock species, by 2024 they were spread all over the island including being seen in town, along most roadsides, and throughout farms and non-farmed land. Feral cattle cause damage to farms, conservation areas, fencing, put pressure on farms' feed supply, and cause a significant risk to vehicles, especially at night. While feral sheep, horses and goats are present, they are in smaller numbers, or in the case of feral goats more restricted in range.

In 2024 MPI did a feral cattle cull by helicopter, which is also discussed in section 5.7 below. This cull removed 5,762 cattle; 356 pigs and 69 sheep from the island and was supported by the community. While there are concerns that the carcases were left where they lay and this has caused an increase in pig numbers, there was general support for the cull. There is no official monitoring, but anecdotally people reported that vegetation has recovered in the last year in areas where cattle were removed and suggested that pre- and post-control monitoring would help understand the impact of feral cattle on vegetation.

While eradicating feral cattle, horses, sheep and pigs would likely be supported as a goal in the Chathams community, ongoing success of such an eradication would be dependent on other factors to ensure that no further stock were released. These factors include a reliable shipping service to take farmed and feral stock to sale, quality fencing on farms to reduce animal escapes, no roadside stock grazing, and buy-in from farmers to ensure that no further stock releases occurred. In the meantime, stock fencing can help to exclude feral stock from sensitive environmental areas.

5.4.7 Hedgehogs, emu, and swans

Occasionally, other pest species were mentioned during discussions including hedgehogs, emus and swans. In general, hedgehogs were viewed negatively with more people in the south indicating they were around than people in the north. Noone indicated they were doing specific hedgehog control although some did note that dogs would identify them but not attack. Hedgehogs are not currently being specifically targeted in CILRT's work on predator control; however, it is likely there would be support if they were included in the list of target species. Hedgehogs have also been included by CILRT in the 'Big 4 Pest' competition as part of the annual pig hunting competition in October 2025, which may increase awareness of hedgehog numbers and their role as a pest on the island.

Emus are in the area around Lake Huro and recent work has suggested they are growing in numbers. The land in this area has extensive gorse coverage. Noone in the community raised significant concerns about emus nor views on how emu should be treated going forwards.

Swans are abundant around the lagoon and lakes. Anecdotally, people we spoke to indicated that swan numbers have increased in recent times. While there is still some harvesting of eggs and swans, in general people felt that hunting of swans had reduced hence the increase in numbers. In addition, several people reported that ECAN had prohibited its staff from shooting,

meaning they could no longer undertake swan control. Some people raised concerns that the swans were causing low-water quality in lagoons and lakes.

5.5 Biosecurity

External and internal biosecurity are widely held concerns in the community. There is significant awareness of the need to protect the islands from further incursions and concern that external biosecurity practices are not sufficient. Within the Chathams, Pitt Island has neither possums nor rats posing an internal biosecurity issue that depends heavily on public awareness. DOC already maintains strong security around visits to the offshore Nature Reserves of Mangere and Rangatira.

We heard that several incursions had been picked up by locals working at the airport and port, for example Chilean guava was prevented from reaching Pitt Island by Air Chathams workers who recognised the plant when going to load the Pitt Island plane. Port workers have identified used bee equipment being imported. A wasp incursion in Waitangi was successfully eliminated.

An increase in planting on Chatham Island, and importing of plants and seeds from New Zealand, were raised as a concern by many about the risks of unwanted organisms in the soil or an unwanted plant species being introduced. Locals also raised that while nurseries must get large quantities of soil (e.g. 1T) from approved suppliers and meet biosecurity controls, anyone can buy a small bag of compost from the Warehouse or other supplier with no biosecurity checks. There were also concerns that ECAN and its contractor SBS Biota are not keeping sufficient records of risks dealt with and any incursions addressed.

The Chathams relies on the marine environment for fishing and tourism as key economic activities and there is high awareness of marine pest risks. A recent example is Japanese seaweed being introduced to Port Hutt, resulting in different regulations for boats operating out of this area. While the regular ship has rodent and marine pest control, there are risks from itinerant yachts, trawlers and other vessels.

There are also upcoming changes to the council procurement of biosecurity and government legislative amendments that will affect biosecurity in the Chathams. In June 2026 ECAN will cease to provide regional council services to CIC. No new contract is in place, although the CIC is looking to negotiate with Auckland Council to provide these services. Auckland Council has experience with island biosecurity due to the Hauraki Gulf Islands. At a national level, the Government has introduced the Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill. This Bill specifies the core services of a local authority as network infrastructure, public transport services, waste management, civil defence emergency management and libraries, museums, reserves, and other recreational facilities. There are concerns that this will result in biosecurity being a secondary priority, especially in areas where council finances are constrained.

Overall, the community pointed to insufficient biosecurity to effectively protect the Chathams. PFC will increase the need for external and internal biosecurity and potentially provide impetus to boost this work. Many noted that the remoteness of the Chathams means it effectively needs an ‘international’ level border between the main islands of New Zealand and the Chathams. Given their expertise with the international border, many thought MPI should have a larger role in Chathams biosecurity and expand their office at Waitangi.

5.6 The role of DOC

Many commented on the role of DOC on the islands including their overall role in conservation, restoration efforts and the management of reserves, tracks and visitors. Locals raised multiple concerns about the knowledge and experience of the Wairarapa Office as the primary office covering the Chathams, how it operates and how to set up contracts for work in the Islands. This section reports how the community viewed DOC in September 2025, when there were only three physical staff in the Chathams so before the appointment of contractors and seasonal staff, and the procurement of services such as fencing from local contractors.

The widespread community view in 2025 was that the DOC presence on the Chathams had all but disappeared with comments such as "haven't seen a DOC person since restructure" or "non-existent on the island now". Many felt that basic work was not occurring on the Chathams, such as fencing, track maintenance, planting and predator control. As a result, stock were getting into reserves (the Chathams DOC office was receiving weekly complaints) and the DOC managed land and facilities were viewed as unkempt. In addition, there were concerns that core specialist skills such as rural fire support, employees with firearms licenses, or the skills to deal with whale strandings no longer existed on island. Both Te One and Kaingaroa Schools reported that previous engagement between DOC and the schools had stopped since the restructure and none of the previous activities done with the students, such as beach clean-ups, or conservation week, occurred in 2025. Following the move of office staff from Te One to Waitangi, there were reports of tourists waiting outside the DOC office in Te One for DOC staff and locals saying it is not as easy to drop in and have a chat now. Overall, the community felt that DOC has lost years of building community relationships due to their "abrupt" exit, and some commented that it will take a minimum of 5 years to get back to where they were.

The community also consider that Chathams' funding has in effect been cut, as not only were staff numbers reduced but important work was not being carried out. While DOC stated the restructure was not a cost cutting measure[69], it has been perceived that way by the community with many asking where the money has gone. Recent internal assessments by DOC have looked at key issues e.g. staff travel costs and found that there are benefits e.g. less is being spent on staff travel. It would be beneficial if DOC clearly communicated to the community in plain English how the funding is still being invested in that Chathams so they can understand that the Chathams is still receiving a similar portion of funding just delivered in a different way.

Much of DOC's work since the restructure has been 'behind the scenes' such as setting up contracts and supporting Chathams companies to be able to meet DOC's procurement requirements. This work is not always visible to the community compared to the more visible presence of workers in DOC uniform, hence the perception that DOC has disappeared. It will take time to build understanding of the new way that DOC is undertaking operational activities in the Chathams. DOC may need to ensure it is visible doing high-profile projects and also ensure that its staff are available in the community, for example attending community events, Densday, or going to the pub in the evenings to talk to locals.

For PFC, both CILRT and DOC note that there is a good working relationship and that the appointment of a programme lead for the Chathams is beneficial to advancing conservation work in the Chathams. Therefore, the critical relationship for PFC between CILRT and DOC is in

[69] www.doc.govt.nz/news/media-releases/2024-media-releases/restructure-of-doc-team-on-chatham-island

place to advance the broader PFC project and Chathams restoration. With CILRT the lead agency for PFC there is minimal risk to the project from the community's perception of DOC.

One risk is the loss of institutional conservation knowledge due to old staff leaving DOC before new staff are appointed. However, this is also an opportunity for the long-term strategy of DOC's operational work in the Chathams, with the option to focus on building capacity and capability amongst the local community to undertake general conservation work (including on private land and reserves) and more specialist tasks. Supporting the training of local islanders in these roles will build local knowledge and expertise in conservation that will be beneficial both to DOC, the community, and other conservation projects such as Predator Free Chathams.

5.7 Animal welfare

Recently, MPI has increased its agricultural presence with a uniformed MPI officer now based on the island. A non-local, official officer is seen as beneficial to work on controlling feral animals and managing stock welfare. Following periods when the boat was unavailable, particularly for two and a half months in early 2024, stock numbers on the Chathams increased significantly due to an inability to ship lambs and calves off the island. Farms were under pressure to feed all the animals, especially with pressure from feral cattle and other feral stock. In response to the animal welfare concerns, MPI therefore undertook the major cull of feral cattle in mid-2024 by helicopter[70]. The operation was limited to land where MPI was given permission to fly and targeted animals without ear tags. While there are some concerns that the cull caused an increase in pig numbers (see section 5.4.4), the cull was generally supported by the community, and MPI is seen as having a positive and important role in the Chathams, as well as the mandate and resources to deal with feral animals.

PFC should have a positive effect on animal welfare so long as technical support and funding are in place. Fencing is required and care is needed to ensure farm and domestic animals are protected in control operations (see section 5.3).

5.8 Forestry, carbon and nurseries

5.8.1 Carbon Farming

Carbon farming has started across the Chathams and is an additional passive income source that combines conserving farmland through covenants and restoration, alongside recent acceleration of planting initiatives from One Billion Trees and Jobs for Nature. One of the drivers for this change is the arrival of Tāmata Hauhā on the island – a New Zealand company financing planting for the NZ ETS. Tāmata Hauhā and its planting plan has proven to be a controversial issue. They have secured the lease of a large station in the northwest of the island, Waitangi West (see Figure 1), that they are planting for carbon farming. In addition, they have secured another five sites in the Chathams where they will undertake planting on private land, such as 210 ha on HMT land in the northeast. Initial planting also has occurred near the intersection of Air Base Road and North Road from the Airport to Waitangi and is pitched as a show forest. Tāmata Hauhā's planting plan is to start with "manuhiri" species, their term for non-natives, to establish the forest followed by planting native trees with the intention that after 20 years the forest will be a native canopy. Tāmata Hauhā applied for and received resource consent for six sites in the Chatham Islands, but a judicial review was initiated by a community member of the

[70] https://www.stuff.co.nz/nz-news/350410373/more-5700-feral-cattle-shot-chatham-island

process undertaken by CIC to grant consents. This was settled out of court in July 2025[71] and where planting had already started it can continue but new consents are required for those that have not started, including assessment of environmental impacts.

We heard many concerns about Tāmata Hauhā's work including the number of introduced species being used on the island as this will be a major change to the landscape, risks of new species becoming wildings, increased fire risk, and present concerns about biosecurity of any soil or potting mix around imported trees. There was much scepticism of the species used with comments that the initial eucalyptus plantings will not survive due to the wind and soil conditions. Many also questioned how the forest would become native after 20 years given the number of introduced species initially planted. Other concerns included not using Air Chathams for freight, not employing locals but bringing in planting crews from New Zealand, and not engaging positively with the community.

Tāmata Hauhā noted that on Waitangi West station they will be spending the first year controlling feral cattle, sheep, goats and pigs as well as possums and weka before they can start planting. Rats will also be controlled but they considered them a secondary problem. They noted that land like Waitangi West is not being farmed well and initiatives like this will support the island economy and restoration. For the Chathams sites, agreement was reached with HMT, ECAN, CIC and SPS Biota to use only nine out of a possible 43 introduced species, all of which already are present in the Chathams. Biosecurity is undertaken at the New Zealand departure airport, in the Chathams and on planting. Approximately 400–500 natives will be planted for every 1000 manuhiri species. Over time it is expected that the natives will replace the introduced species but there will be no active work to remove introduced species once natives reach maturity.

Tāmata Hauhā are working with some on island nurseries but have found they can fly in trees at half the price to those grown on the Chathams. Their plans include extensive fire controls such as fire breaks, fire extinguishers on equipment and fire and health and safety protocols. Henga Lodge has been leased for short-term workers from New Zealand. The issue they have with local workers is inconsistent availability due to common multiple job holding that results in workers who say they cannot come to work today as they are going fishing, which affects programming. If there was a reliable local planting crew that was organised and built a good reputation they would consider using them. They are employing local cooks and cleaners, providing additional part-time work opportunities to locals. Tāmata Hauhā also want to invest in the community and are looking to develop a shearing school at Waitangi West, restore the orchard and have a community food forest.

Very recently, work proved that the local Chatham Island swamp tarahinau (*Dracophyllum scoparium*) can grow to at least 5 m tall. This is a key development for native carbon farming, as for native forests to qualify for the ETS scheme they need to have a 30% canopy cover for trees that will reach at least 5 m in height[72]. Proving that the swamp tarahinau meets this requirement has boosted native forest carbon farming potential on the Chathams. There is also ongoing work in the Chathams and elsewhere looking at carbon sequestering in peat and wetlands and from predator control.

[71] https://www.cic.govt.nz/your-council/news-and-events/2025/settlement-reached-in-judicial-review-relating-to-chatham-islands-afforestation-consents

[72] https://www.mynativeforest.com/blog/native-trees-in-nz-ets

To enable carbon farming of native forest areas on the Chathams, land needs to be fenced off. Landowners are getting funding to undertake this fencing either via grants such as from Ngā Whenua Rāhui, or they are working with companies such as Verity who provide the upfront capital for fencing and take a proportion of the carbon profits to repay these costs.

While the minimum requirement for the NZ ETS scheme is to fence the land off and allow it to regenerate naturally, there are also opportunities to instead sell carbon credits on the domestic or international voluntary carbon markets. In these markets, native forests that are being restored via additional plantings or predator control may attract a premium price. In addition, while the ETS is focused on areas that have or are being reforested since 1990, the international carbon market is less concerned about the age of the forest, which means landowners with older native forest blocks have more options.

There are significant potential impacts from diversification of Chathams' farmland into carbon farming. First is retiring of land from farming. In most, but not all cases, the land being retired is not highly productive and will provide an additional passive income without affecting the wider farm operations. However, some land, such as Waitangi West, is being transitioned to forest where the land is not poor but rather not farmed well. In these cases, conservation practices need to be weighed up against pastoral faming.

Second, farms that are getting grants or capital support for fencing to enable carbon farming can lay out these fences in a strategic manner to create more appropriate farm block shapes and sizes that support the wider farm operations. In addition, fencing creates work for local contractors.

Third, there is an increase in land and wetlands that is fenced off from farm and feral stock and will regenerate as habitat for birds, whether naturally or through additional restoration plantings. There is an opportunity to further support the conservation outcomes from this restoration by undertaking predator control, which may in turn attract a higher carbon market price. Where predator control is undertaken by locals and native plants are sourced from local nurseries, this provides income and employment opportunities to local communities. There may also be ways for these activities to be coordinated with the wider predator free project and the work that CILRT are undertaking.

However, there are some risks associated with the work being undertaken. For example, due to its quick growing character akeake is favoured for planting. Many people in the conservation space pointed out that while these trees grow quickly and are a great starting species, a resilient habitat and food source for birdlife requires a variety of tree species. In addition, predator control is needed to protect wildlife that spread naturally from protected to unprotected areas. There is also the issue, noted above, of using introduced verses native species.

5.8.2 Nurseries

Nine nurseries were able to leverage the One Billion Trees and Jobs for Nature projects to set up or scale up. Following their One Billion Trees grants HMT are now running their own nursery and growing 60,000 trees per annum. The 20 years old KMP nursery has been able to scale up operations through the One Billion Trees and Jobs for Nature projects so that they can start to deliver the scale of trees, over 100,000 per annum, required by Tāmata Hauhā.

Following their success as a tree nursery, KMP has received a CIET grant to significantly upscale its development of a weekly vege box service over the summer months, which proved so popular in its first summer they were unable to keep up with demand. With most available

vegetables imported from New Zealand, this diversification contributes to the sustainability and resilience of the island (see also 4.8.1).

One of the ongoing challenges is inconsistent demand for trees. Akeake grows in approximately 12 months, making it easy to grow for short term contracts. However, other natives require up to 3 years to grow so require longer term contracts and certainty of demand for nurseries to invest in growing these species at scale. While many of the micro-nurseries have closed, they could be activated again if demand was there due to restoration efforts and expanding community interest in planting to enhance habitats. The other challenge is finding employees to work at the larger nurseries who are reliable, a strategic issue we pick up below.

5.9 Economic diversification

Community members noted that the natural environment is key to all the major economic activities in the Chathams – agriculture, fishing, forestry and tourism. While nature is seen to have intrinsic benefits predator control and eradication projects were recognised by the community to have flow-on impacts on the island economy, livelihoods and social life.

5.9.1 Agriculture and farming

While farming has always been a key industry on the Chathams and is likely to remain so, many farmers spoke of the ongoing difficulties with farming and a major decline over the last 3 years. In particular, the impacts of months without a ship in 2024 created major logistics issues. Several farms de-stocked as a result and are only just getting back to their original numbers and returning to positive financial returns. As noted, MPI continues to monitor stocking levels and animal welfare on the island. Farmers are constantly concerned about whether the ship will take sufficient animals each visit to take lambs and calves, and how capacity will be distributed amongst farmers.

While the farming community we met with are supportive of the Predator Free Chathams project, the day-to-day reality of farming and its associated stress leaves little energy to engage in PFC. Our observations showed that farms that have diversified and had some tourism, or other income sources alongside farming, build resilience for difficult economic times and transport failures. Therefore, a PFC that enables new economic activities such as tourist walks on private land, or conservation employment in predator control or restoration, can provide positive benefits to the farming community through enabling new income streams to support farm families.

Many farmers were undertaking or keen to do predator control or native restoration but do not always have the time or resources to undertake the work. They recognise the cost of predators to their farm through damage to vegetation and that eradication of key species such as possums and rats would have a long-term, positive benefit. Several spoke that if traps were provided to farms, they could be placed along regularly travelled routes to make it easy for farmers to support trapping activities. For example, placing traps at gates allows someone getting out to open the gate anyway to check and reset a rat or cat trap without having to make a specific trip.

Other initiatives such as funding fences for carbon sequestration can be leveraged to create strategic fence lines that fence off an area for regeneration, but at the same time might fence waterways, roads, or break up large blocks into more suitable smaller blocks. Currently there is funding to undertake feral pig trapping trials which, if successful, will support farms by reducing feral pig numbers and meet the wider goals of Predator Free Chathams.

One of the other points of discussion with farmers was the acceptability and feasibility of aerial toxins on farms. Views on toxins are discussed more generally in section 5.3, but one of the issues for using aerial toxin in an inhabited area is the impact on stock management. Much depends on the poison used, but with some poisons it is necessary to fully de-stock a property, such as moving stock to another area, to enable an aerial toxin operation. Farmers views on this issue were also dependent on their views around aerial toxin use, however, there was openness to further discussions on the issue. For some the complexities of moving stock were significant, but other farmers noted that if it was for a one-off operation with the goal of rat eradication then the long-term benefits of having no rats would be worth the inconvenience of having to move stock off the farm. We are not aware of any plans for aerial toxin distribution or de-stocking any time in the future, but as PFC looks to methods for predator eradication in the northwest and south these issues will need to be discussed in more depth including other options, such as long-life farm bait stations developed by ZIP.

5.9.2 Fishing

Commercial fishing is recognised to be declining in the Chathams (see section 4.3.3). Comments across the community confirmed the statistical data with many people commenting on the fishing industry e.g. “crayfish down”, “fishing not making money”, “fishing down”. Locals commented on the reduction in boats for example from 17 to six boats in Kaingaroa, and down to two to three active fishing boats in Port Hutt. Not only are prices down but catch effort has increased and fuel prices are up meaning the cost of time on the water is higher for the catch return. In Kaingaroa, fishermen commented that while cod is collected from Kaingaroa, crayfish need to be driven to Owenga which is a 146 km return trip and costs a significant amount in fuel. The result is that fishing is continuing to be a more marginal or supplementary activity to other sectors, and some fishers are leaving the islands and the community resulting in further population loss.

Fishing has become a more marginal income source, one still very dependent on the weather. People who fish or work on fishing boats therefore tend to need flexibility to be able to go fishing on a good day. This flexibility is not necessarily compatible with other employment opportunities such as planting for the new carbon farming initiatives or work in tourism where employers are looking for reliable people who are available 5 days a week. Conservation related projects that can provide flexible employment compatible with fishing will have a positive impact through income diversification for fishers. There are also opportunities for people with fishing boats to provide eco-tourism opportunities such as bird watching tours, as discussed below.

Finally, some people recognised that the long-term benefits of a Predator Free Chathams is a recovery of the land-marine dynamic which could provide positive benefits to fishing.

5.9.3 Tourism

Tourist activity is commonly expected to provide a basis for economic regeneration in rural areas and nature-based tourism is expected to provide benefits to biodiversity, natural landscapes and restoration actions. However, tourism also undergoes economic cycles that drive the level of tourist activity, most recently for the Chathams there was the effects of the Covid pandemic, and potentially, in addition to economic cycles there are natural and public health events ahead. There are also issues in many New Zealand tourism communities with social impacts from too much tourism and resulting host resistance. We expect both positive and negative effects are amplified in small communities, due to the issues of isolation,

transport constraints, and limited infrastructure, small hospitality workforce and limited social capacity.

As found elsewhere, there were those supportive of tourism as an economic activity in the Chathams and those that were not. Those that were supportive generally wanted to see an increase in tourist numbers, with the peak experienced during the Covid-19 period considered a good goal. They were also keen to see a spread of tourism into shoulder months, but many noted that the winter period (late April to early October) is still not a good time for visitors to come to the island. Tourism is at present predominantly i.e. upwards of 90%, domestic tourists. Opportunities to attract more international, nature-based tourists were identified. As is typical in island communities, there is also a group of people that were not keen to see tourism expand. Some people commented that the Covid peak was too high and they would not be keen on a return to that number of tourists.

To be beneficial to the community and provide as many positive impacts as possible, tourism needs to be low impact on community values such as the sense of isolation and the natural environment. Eco-tourism is widely seen as the future for tourism in the Chathams, and most tourism businesses are already focused on the environment and provide opportunities for employment and support to local businesses. Operators that provide fishing tours also provide bird-watching boat tours and note that these are very low impact on the environment. Many activities in the Chathams involve crossing or accessing private land and it is typical for the local landowner to charge for this access.

There is strong support for the tour-group model that most current tourism in the Chathams is based on, as guided groups suit the available transport options and reduce impacts on specific sites and the wider community. Groups often have a focus such as birds, photography, or walking. Several people noted an issue with independent tourists who are not respectful of private property boundaries and the need to request and pay for access over land. It was noted this is a particular problem with European tourists as many European countries have a right for individuals to cross land without requesting permission. Remote AirBnBs such as Port Hutt, Owenga and Kaingaroa noted that they get independent tourists who want to get off the beaten track and these operators provide support to guests. Other AirBnBs accommodate visiting officials, locals e.g. Pitt Islanders waiting for flights, and family members visiting the Chathams.

There is a lack of capital funding to provide public infrastructure for tourism (e.g. signage, tracks, product development) and ongoing operating funding to maintain these facilities. Operators cannot build further accommodation in Waitangi without an improvement to the wastewater system. Tourism also places a burden on the medical system as guests tend to be older and come with more complicated medical issues. Individuals noted they would like to diversify attractions by creating walks or small-scale accommodation but simply do not have the capacity or capital funding to do so. There needs to be enough demand to make it worthwhile for people to invest further in tourism infrastructure.

Tourism Chathams Islands is not an RTO but is working to raise the profile of the Chathams and work with other tourism agencies. Due to regional tourism funding structures, it is hard for Tourism Chatham Islands to access some grants e.g. advertising funding has to be applied for in conjunction with other RTOs but none are closely linked to the Chathams, or local government needs to make a significant contribution alongside a tourism application but CIC does not have the finances to do so. Current work is on raising the profile of Chathams initiatives such as Science Week and creating new group tourism opportunities such as developing walks to

attract groups. PFC can impact positively on promoting the Chathams as a nature tourism destination and supporting fund applications.

5.9.4 The links to shipping, air services and island infrastructure

Shipping, port capacity, fuel storage and supplies remain central for the islanders. Conversations centre on the frequency and capacity of shipping and provision for a suitable new ship.[73] PFC is expected to have a direct impact on shipping and vice versa. Shipping services affect procurement of larger and bulk supplies including fuel, fencing material and toxins. It also affects the ability of future workers to live affordably on island. In the longer term, a strong conservation economy will reinforce demand and pricing of the future shipping services to the islands. Finally, the port, airport, yachts and cruise vessels pose risks for biosecurity and protecting the Chathams from new invasive species, and reinvasion once species are eradicated.

5.9.5 Employment opportunities

A PFC programme of work should create employment opportunities for resident islanders as well as external operators in a context where work opportunities are described as “grim”. The success of the programme to achieve and then maintain full predator free status will depend on the ability to attract, pay and house local and external short- and long-term workers, including technical support people and potentially seasonal volunteers. There is potential for many households to have members gain employment on PFC and related work such as habitat restoration, species conservation, transport, biosecurity, monitoring, other services and the visitor sector. Employment opportunities will have a positive impact on community attitudes to conservation as shown by the Jobs for Nature experience on Pitt Island.

For work across the economy, in fishing, farming, conservation and tourism there is a tendency to bring in outside workers despite extra costs of plane fares, housing, etc. Recent tree planting for carbon farming is an example given. As yet there is no strong effort to develop a local conservation workforce around a pipeline of future work, although there is a shift in public conservation work (DOC based) to contract out work previously completed by island-based staff. Another aspect of conservation employment is the level of pay and motivation to work versus working in another sector, such as a deck hand in fishing.

The local workforce, such as field staff needed to advance the first and second phases of PFC, is not large, in the likely range of 4–5 FTEs for the northeast and perhaps up to 10 FTE for the northwest phase, plus operational and office support. In addition to this direct PFC work there will be employment in related conservation work such as nurseries where up to 20 people are estimated as already employed full or part time, plus there are people employed in planting work. There is also a related impact on work in the visitor sector and an induced flow of work into all other sectors such as transport, food supply and social services. On the Chathams a small number of jobs on island can have a significant social impact, especially if they support a family, or a young person to stay. Useful jobs include part-time and seasonal work, including work for youth coming home for the holidays.

We found individuals have built jobs and the necessary skills in conservation and nursery work by trial and error and this experience needs to be built into future training programmes (discussed in 6.5 below).

[73] Chatham Islands Investment Strategy

5.10 Sustaining the community

Many people spoke of the reduction in population over their lifetime – as shown by the census data (see section 4.1.1). In particular, outer communities noted population declines with several commenting that Kaingaroa used to have around 110 residents but is now down to 24 to 26 people, Port Hutt only has a couple of residents, and Owenga used to have 20–30 children at the school which is now closed. It was also noted that there is considerable population turnover with one person estimating 700 different people leaving over 40 years. Reflecting this population churn and overall loss are comments that there is less engagement, fewer people attending activities, and fewer activities available. Although some noted that smaller proportions of the community now attend events (e.g. only a quarter now turn up to the races when everyone used to go) which may reflect a wider number of activities to do at home and reduced social cohesion.

Any population increase is seen as a beneficial social impact that can support community activities and make infrastructure investment worthwhile. A small population increase can also impact schools, with schools noting that a single family moving into or out of the area can have a significant effect on the school roll. A population increase and reduced churn is dependent on many factors, including the availability of employment and housing (see section 0).

5.11 Children and PFC

The schools have a history of engaging with conservation, previously with DOC and more recently with the CILRT. There is an opportunity for CILRT to provide conservation engagement to the schools and children, with a positive impact for conservation projects through raising awareness with families, via the children, on the importance of local species and the need for predator control and habitat restoration.

The CILRT and other groups have already taken this approach, including HMT engaging with Kaingaroa School on the recent hakoakoa / tītī translocation, and Te One School have been involved with penguin nest boxes. The teachers noted the kids love to be engaged and do outside activities, but it is also important that they get to see their work, e.g. nest boxes, being placed and revisiting to see if they are working. Projects that schools can walk to are also beneficial as it means there is no need to budget for the cost of a bus.

Children's sign. Source: Nick Taylor

Te One School has trips to Taiko Camp sponsored by the Taiko Trust, including day drips for juniors, a night for middle school and up to a week for the senior classes. Te One School also runs a careers unit for their years 7 and 8 including a work experience day – previously there were opportunities to go out with DOC rangers. CILRT and other conservation trusts could also offer work experience opportunities to raise the awareness of PFC and conservation employment opportunities.

An opportunity to talk to children at Kaingaroa primary school about their understanding of pests, native species and what PFC might look like for them showed they were aware of rats, cats, and possums as pests – also "brats" which appeared to refer to siblings! Specifically, they had named a big rat "ratatouille" eating the community garden and were aware of the damage it had caused. Weka and pigs were both mentioned for their potential damage (e.g. weka kill chickens) and pigs were noted as hunted by the kids. They had good memories of planting days and going to see the recently relocated hakoakoa / tītī with HMT and were aware of many bird species including black robins, kōkō / tūī, parakeets, hakoakoa / tītī, emus, shags, kahu, pārēā / parea, and sparrows. To test whether they had an awareness of conservation as a potential employment future we asked what they wanted to be when they grow up and the ideas were: a robber, a police officer (so he can arrest all his friends for fun), a barrel rider, and a horse rider.

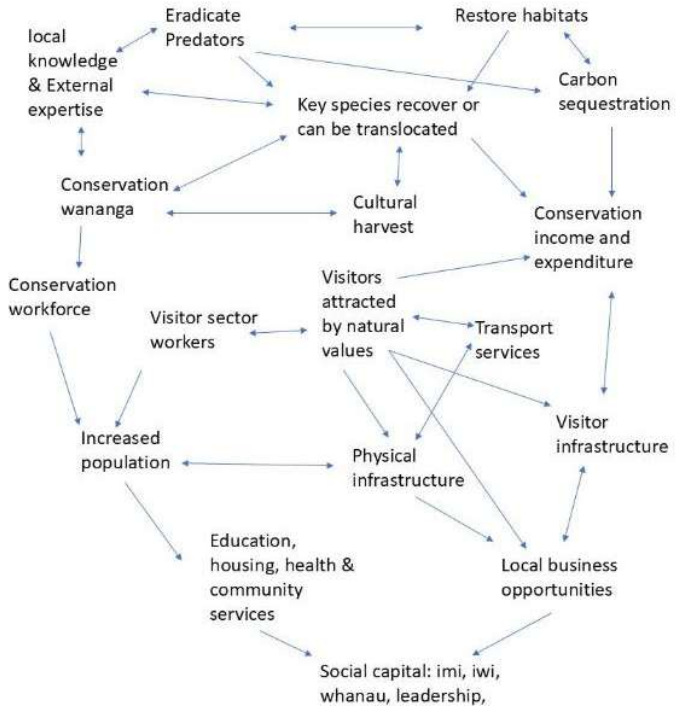
Parea. Source: Jess Mackenzie

6 Strategic pathway and recommendations

In this section we take the findings from above, discuss significant issues and provide suggestions and recommendations for a future strategic pathway for PFC (see boxes). This part of the report is intended to assist the CILRT with implementation and management plans relating to PFC and may also provide other agencies with information to inform their work in the Chathams.

We found that to restore the korowai of the Chathams requires both ecological understanding of the effects of predators on birdlife as well as social research. Relationships in the ecosystem and what is required to eradicate predators need to be understood, including managing their spread and possible reinvasion, and how these actions contribute to restoration. PFC is also all about people, culture and economy. The community is the heart of the work of PFC, CILRT and other conservation-focused efforts such as stock management, species translocations, habitat protection and enhancement, and carbon sequestration at multiple sites.

Figure 11: Linking the social impacts of island restoration



Success of PFC will flow into jobs, a strong conservation and visitor workforce, housing and social services, strong imi and iwi, and local leadership, with island people restoring their relationships with land and sea. This report therefore has a social-ecological approach to impact assessment as a starting premise.

The links between predator eradication and restoration of habitats and their social impacts are shown in Figure 11. The diagram shows how the social impacts flow between each other with the result of impacting social capital and community wellbeing in line with outcomes the community have defined (see section 2.2).

6.1 Strategic Issues

6.1.1 Leadership and partnerships

The CILRT has wide community support and is well positioned to lead PFC. We recommend that they continue to lead work on a predator free and restored Chathams, including feral cat eradication and conservation restoration on Pitt Island. Their role is to build necessary

partnerships, drive future funding and lead a clear, achievable programme of work. DOC is recognised as having an important role and has technical expertise to support PFC. There is a growing role of imi and iwi in conservation on the Chathams, as well as a role for CIET and the Council operating in the conservation space. To advance PFC, CILRT Trustees and the project coordinator need to continue to work with their key partners and build relationships with other stakeholders. CILRT has good relationships already with imi, iwi, CIC and the CIET, are strengthening the relationship with DOC and building relationships with other organisations both across New Zealand and internationally and this will continue to be part of their work. Indigenous representation on the Trust through imi and iwi representatives ensures cultural principles and approaches are incorporated into CILRT's work. For example, Moriori cultural principles recognise nature and the whole landscape as a living presence with its own manawa, offering life-giving energy to tchakat henu / tangata whenua and miheke / taonga species. Moriori wāhi tchap' / wāhi tapu / sacred sites are carefully cared for and protected by Moriori, reflecting a deep cultural responsibility. This shared respect for the landscape underscores the importance of collaboration, ensuring that care for the henu / whenua / land is carried forward together.

- All parties should recognise leadership of PFC including the Pitt Island feral cat eradication lies with CILRT and support them appropriately, while building necessary partnerships and collaboration, and avoiding fragmented approaches.
- CILRT should continue to invest in their key partnerships both with Chathams organisations (imi, iwi, CIC, CIET etc.), national organisations (DOC etc.) and international organisations (BirdLife International, IOCC etc.). It is important for the Trustees and CILRT team to recognise that building and maintaining stakeholder relationships can take significant time and effort and that these activities need to be fully resourced.

6.1.2 Connect communities and organisations in an islands-wide effort

Advancing predator elimination and eventual eradication, and habitat restoration on the Chathams requires the efforts of CILRT and others. Consistent messaging is needed to communicate that all the parts add to the whole-of-islands effort to reestablish the korowai. Every rat or possum killed contributes to the effort. Every native tree planted, cat desexed, or fence aligned to protect a piece of bush or a small lake or wetland helps. Every species translocation or range expansion is a win. With the small amount of public or DOC land, community leadership and ownership of conservation on private land is at the heart of this journey (Sanson 2025).

- CILRT should lead the development of a comprehensive picture of conservation work across the Chathams including mapping all individual, imi, iwi, trusts, government and other initiatives.
- CILRT should include the successes of all conservation efforts and how they contribute to PFC in communications about the wider project. Consider showcasing stories of how Chatham Islanders have supported conservation efforts including historic efforts.

The lessons learnt report for Lord Howe (Lord Howe Island Board 2025) suggests having community champions. In the Chathams, community champions could support the project coordinator and communications team of the CILRT to champion PFC e.g. through in person discussions with individuals, attending community events to provide updates on the project, and supporting more formal communications such as updates in the weekly newsletter and on social media. Community champions would support the project coordinator (already acting as

a local champion) and communications coordinator enabling them to do more technical work including developing the whole of Chathams picture and building external partnership relationships. Community champions could also take an information role e.g. helping answer questions and connect people to other individuals or groups that might advise them on what traps or toxin to use or how to access funding for stock fencing and protecting private land. There could also be an opportunity for community champions to engage with the local schools and ECE groups on a regular basis. It is likely that these roles would need to be voluntary positions within the wider CILRT project team under the project coordinator. Champions in specific areas such as the northeast, southwest and Pitt Island may be beneficial as the project progresses.

- CILRT should consider community champion roles and whether they are formal or informal and how they fit in the wider project team structure; if formal develop a volunteer role description and identify people to take on these roles.

6.1.3 Funding CILRT and PFC

For a strong funding base, it is important CILRT develops funding support for short-term projects and longer-term core funding, with core funding the primary concern. When seeking future funding, PFC should be phrased as the opportunity to join a globally attractive, flagship effort in island conservation with strong local leadership, indigenous partnerships, and an organisation with community support in place.

CILRT is already undertaking a number of funding initiatives including applying for grants and exploring relationships that can provide financial support. These initiatives should be continued and other opportunities constantly investigated.

- The Island-Ocean Connection Challenge (IOCC) - a global initiative created by a "collective of NGOs, governments, funders, scientists, individuals, and island communities dedicated to restoring and rewilding 40 globally significant island-ocean ecosystems by 2030."[74]
- The Rata Foundation.
- The Tindall Foundation.
- Visitor levy funds, which include funding for conservation work as well as funding for visitor-focussed projects such as the development of walking trails, interpretation and infrastructure such as toilets.
- Private sector partnerships e.g. Air Chathams and organisations such as Endangered Species Foundation.

There is also complementary work through organisations that are funded independently to work on related programmes, such as the Bioeconomy Science Institute or university student projects. These are important relationships for PFC. There may also be opportunities to further leverage tourism as a funding source as discussed in section 6.3.2.

- CILRT should place emphasis on a sustainable amount of core funding for day-to-day operations.
- CILRT should continue to build relationships, partnerships and agreements with external parties to develop multiple funding streams for long and short-term projects

[74] https://www.jointheiocc.org/about

The overall strategy should allow for a variety of projects by smaller and larger landholders and island organisations within a coordinated approach. This approach can involve CILRT providing advice to landowners on possibilities for supporting habitat protection at local and landscape scales, including managing projects on contract. CILRT can assist individual property owners to connect with funding sources that include DOC covenants to protect biodiversity on private properties, with funding in full or in part such as for fencing, and Ngā Whenua Rāhui, who support restoration and protection on Māori land.

A new opportunity is from New Zealand enterprises that assist farmers to leverage the carbon market as an income alternative to stock farming and to deliver income from land such as peatlands that otherwise are largely underutilised. Organisations such as Tāmata Hauhā and Verity provide the upfront costs and technical support for fencing and tree planting for enhancing natural regeneration. Predator control can increase the amount of carbon sequestered and therefore increase the carbon credits earnt. This income is acknowledged on the Chathams as a handy addition to farm income. These private arrangements create a potential income source for CILRT through technical advice, supplies such as traps, and contract eradication work. Furthermore, these initiatives are now part of the big picture of landscape restoration and should be part of planning for large scale efforts such as the location of fences and buffer zones.

- CILRT should consider opportunities such as contracts for predator control work on DOC or carbon land, as a method of developing a conservation workforce and as a funding stream to the Trust.

6.1.4 Benefiting the community

One of the key positive impacts CILRT can have for the Chathams community is strategic hiring. Part-time employment benefits locals and the community by providing critical additional income streams. Being a flexible employer that understands the community and the dynamic nature of part-time and seasonal work, such as being able to adapt to the weather, to fishing, and other commitments, will provide the most positive employment opportunities to locals.

The second key impact is thinking strategically when hiring off-island long-term workers, by assisting a partner to find employment in the Chathams and to support individuals with young families. Hiring one person that brings additional people with them has positive benefits on the population which in turn can have positive benefits on school roll numbers and wider community energy, economic activity through supporting shops and local businesses, and engagement with community activities and events. New people bring additional skills to the island, and increased population supports community or physical infrastructure investment. The major constraint for hiring new workers is housing and CILRT needs to work with CIC, CIET, imi and iwi who are well placed to address housing shortages.

- CILRT should position itself as a dynamic and flexible employment organisation that works within the part-time, seasonal and multiple job holding landscape of the Chathams.
- When hiring long-term, off island staff all organisations should consider how a potential employee/contractor's partner or young family could be supported as well, to provide community wide positive impacts.
- CILRT should work with island partners to consider housing constraints and develop a plan to ensure there will be sufficient accommodation for the project and its workers.

6.1.5 Monitor progress

It is important to monitor and evaluate progress of PFC to identify the effectiveness of actions, inform ongoing planning of the programme and build community support by knowing what works well, where and why. Monitoring (ecological and social) helps to inform funding bodies about the outcomes of PFC. It requires easily understood targets, milestones and impacts, and a range of data on how these are being met. Volunteers, community members, schools, and external researchers can help to gather data. Islanders are highly observant of their environment and CILRT can use citizen science techniques, such as a website to record photos and observations on changes in the land-ocean interface.

CILRT already has a framework of outcomes including actions and what success looks like for the Chathams and makes quarterly reports on trap numbers and predator removal. This framework could be developed to include measures and a reporting process that includes the full range of activities, including social-economic impacts.

- CILRT further develop a PFC monitoring framework and ways for researchers and the community to contribute to data about PFC impacts.

6.2 Phasing of significant interventions

We found support for phasing PFC while building community support, capacity and expertise. CILRT should continue to phase PFC as a programme of work that focuses on agreed geographical areas, as with phase one in the northeast. Other early projects to consider include Pitt Island feral cats, a community showcase project, and species translocations.

Phasing of effort makes sense socially because it suits:

- the geography of Chatham Islands and the central Te Whanga Lagoon that divides the islands into manageable sectors
- the potential for CILRT to build sometimes fragmented efforts into a coherent approach through working with different landholders and the efforts of DOC, Trusts, imi, iwi and Council
- the fragmented funding available and the potential to build a funding base over time as funds become available and individuals take initiatives
- the opportunity to test methods of predator control and habitat restoration and build technical skills and knowledge/mātauranga on the islands
- the need to gather information on social-ecological impacts of PFC, and to document all achievements
- the need to evaluate progress and build community support and confidence around impacts (social licence).

6.2.1 Phase one implementation

As discussed in section 5.2 there is general community support for the current phasing set out in the CILRT strategy and the work in the northeast area. Consideration should be given to the animals included in next steps for CILRT. There is support for the current targets of rats, possums and feral cats. Including a specific plan for control of feral pigs, but not eradication, would likely be welcomed by the community but CILRT needs to consider the feasibility of including additional species. Mice, hedgehogs, and other feral species such as goats, sheep and emu could also be included in the CILRT goals and strategy but may require specific engagement with the community.

CILRT is working on an implementation plan for completion of the northeast area. This plan will include further details on potential tools and methodologies. There remain questions for the community around the feasibility of eradicating species, the costs, and whether it can be funded. CILRT should include clear explanations of these issues, and unknowns where appropriate.

- CILRT should continue to advance the northeast project with monitoring, and communication of progress, so the community can see this part of PFC in action and gain confidence in the tools used
- CILRT should complete the Restoring Rēkohu – an Implementation Plan for eradicating possums and feral cates from Northeast Rēkohu for the northeast, drawing on local knowledge, external expertise (ecological and social), and existing ecological and social reports.

There are questions around how rats will be eradicated and concerns in the community about toxin use. How to advance discussions with the community with regards to toxins is discussed below in section 6.2.7. With regards to eradicating rats, there are different options for the northeast area with different benefits and costs, ecologically and socially. For example, options might include suppression through traps, ground-based eradication or aerial-based eradication with ground-based eradication around inhabited areas.

- CILRT should ensure the Restoring Rēkohu – an Implementation Plan for eradicating possums and feral cates from Northeast Rēkohu includes options for rats and consider the costs and benefits of each option ecologically, socially and economically.

Kaingaroa village has a small population (estimates of up to 30 people) and provides an opportunity in the northeast to showcase eradication in an inhabited area and the benefits of living rat free to the Chathams community. This is a localised option to demonstrate ground-based toxin use for local control, although constant work would be needed to deal with reinvasions from the surrounding rural area. Alternatively, a full network of self-resetting traps could be used but would likely be significantly more expensive and, while traps may suppress the rat population, they are unlikely to achieve elimination.

Kaingaroa could be a case study for looking at the costs of predators to individuals and the potential savings from rat suppression or eradication. Building on the work on Ventotene Island, Kaingaroa residents, the school, farms, and businesses could be surveyed to quantify the amount they spend on rodent control and the cost of damage done by rats before a local elimination project. Surveys post establishment of a network of traps or bait stations could identify the actual effects of the project. This work could also look at the ecological benefits of the actions including asking locals to report on bird and other wildlife both before and after the project.

- CILRT should consider Kaingaroa as a showcase inhabited area and choose an option with the community for rodent suppression (via self-resetting traps) or elimination (via bait stations).
- CILRT should undertake work to quantify the actual costs of rodents and benefits of elimination to the community.
- CILRT should work with the community to undertake bird counts and other wildlife surveys, and record observations of bird and other wildlife before and after a localised project.

6.2.2 Pitt Island feral cats – a possible early win

Pitt Island has the potential for both translocations and natural recolonisation but needs a dedicated feral cat eradication project. Feral cat eradication on Pitt Island is understood to be supported by the local community and technically feasible; the key issue is funding.

Comments we heard regarding Pitt Island feral cats pointed to the need to re-engage the island population once funding is secured and a more detailed plan on methods and approach has been developed. It will be important for the project to consider ways to benefit the local community from the project, such as employing locals and sourcing accommodation and food from locals for the specialised cat eradication teams.

Alongside the feral cat eradication work, the community should continue to be offered desexing of domestic cats, which has been successful to date. The CIC needs to advance work to implement a Chathams bylaw on domestic cats including the need for desexing and potentially other requirements such as microchipping, constraints around transport and importing of domestic cats, and consider the number of cats allowed on one property.

Once the feral cats are removed there is the high likelihood of natural recolonisation of birdlife from the nearby islands. This goal is the basis for building a common cause in removing the feral cats and getting a clear win on the board. Positive community views and possible funding sources are likely to be assisted by the recent PF2050 decision to include feral cats as a target species.

- CILRT should look to obtain funding and technical assistance to work with the Pitt Island community to eradicate feral cats on Pitt Island: an early win that will gain recognition for PFC as a goal both on the islands and in New Zealand.
- CILRT should advocate to CIC to develop and implement a feral cat bylaw for the Chathams.

6.2.3 Other showcase projects

Looking ahead to phase two it would be useful to work in advance with landholders and residents along both arms adjoining Te Whanga Lagoon to develop a programme of fencing, pest control and planting that enhances these arms of land and coast as biodiversity corridors and as future predator buffers. Also, advance this cooperation to provide visitor experiences across properties, with sharing of any concession charges and visitor payments through these areas.

- In anticipation of beginning phase two in the northwest of Chatham Island, CILRT could begin engagement with land holders around Lake Horo and southern Whanga Lagoon to develop a coordinated approach to fencing, restoration and predator control for a future buffer zone across the island.

Te Whanga Lagoon. Source: Nick Taylor

A further idea is to develop a central showcase project in the Te One or Waitangi area. The purpose of this project would be to build community engagement and potentially link to tourism as an income source for the CILRT. Ideally this project would identify some undeveloped land near the central part of the island that is easily accessible by locals, Te One School and visitors. Together they could help to develop or extend a restored bush area with predator control, stock fencing and, long-term, potentially translocations of birds. Being physically accessible to Science House and the education facilities in Te One – the school, the Kohanga Reo, and any future ECE centre would have further positive impacts through enabling engagement with local children, and by extension their hunau/whanau. Such a project could also link to conservation training (see section 6.6 below). Finally, it would be another opportunity to deliver funding to CILRT through donations and visitor access depending on landowner access agreements (see tourism recommendations for more detail).

- CILRT should consider developing a central showcase project and if agreed identify locations, develop landowner access agreements and a restoration plan, and work with area residents.

6.2.4 Translocate iconic and culturally significant species

A significant focus of the CILRT's work is creating an area, and eventually entire islands, that are predator free. Alongside this work the CILRT should continue to work on their restoration plan including key translocations that support endemic and culturally important species and give focus to restoration work to develop sites that are suitable for those species. For example, deciding whether to translocate Forbes parakeet to the main Chatham Island before the red-crowned parakeet naturally spreads from the south to the north would drive focus on developing a suitable site in the northeast, including forest restoration alongside the planned predator control. Alternatively, work has already been undertaken on black robin sites (Parker et al. 2023) and CILRT could decide how it could support restoring a site and, if needed, delivering access agreements. Seabirds are important to an island community and can be important to the health of island forests, therefore, there may be other key seabird species that would benefit from translocation and would also benefit that site.

- CILRT should develop a translocation plan including the steps needed to support those translocations e.g. Project Song[75].

6.2.5 Develop research relationships

Research relationships are another important part of PFC. These include government science funding such as BSI-SCION group who have a Marsden funded project called "Change in the Chathams - A journey of self-sufficiency and restoration." Researchers are working with HMT and the wider community on projects such as growing selected endemic species at scale. They are also investigating waste minimisation[76]. Universities and polytechnics also regularly have their staff and students hosted on the Chathams to undertake research and training, often including small projects.

[75] https://projectislandsong.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Translocation-Feasibility-Action-Plan-2014.pdf
[76] https://www.scionresearch.com/about-us/about-scion/corporate-publications/scion-connections/past-issues-list/scion-connections-issue-43,-june-2023/change-in-the-chathams-a-journey-of-self-sufficiency-and-restoration

- CILRT should continue to pursue research relationships that directly benefit PFC but are funded independently and encourage their connections with the annual Chatham Islands Festival of Science.

6.3 Ongoing communications and future conversations

To implement PFC with success requires engagement with appropriate communications essential to eradication planning and implementation. Communication should aim to connect with all members of the community, as well as visitors, funders, technical personnel and other external stakeholders. Currently, the existing project team is stretched with undertaking stakeholder engagement, communication and funding activities as well as the physical trapping project. It would be helpful to expand the team and to ensure one, island-based person is dedicated to engaging with landowners. This person would develop and maintain an internal understanding of each landowner's position on eradication and methods through 1:1 meetings, confidential surveys and other methods. Communications with all groups is essential to building social licence for predator free activities and associated restoration efforts, to support local procurement and business development, and to achieve the CILRT goal of *Collaborating with and empowering others*. The project team also needs to have social and ecological experts as ecological and social research require equal standing in the planning of eradications on inhabited islands (Lord Howe Island Board 2025; Taylor et al. 2020). Planning work and key documents should include social science and ecological inputs, so that technical advice on social and ecological issues can successfully advance the project.

- CILRT should continue to build a community-based approach and social licence to operate. Information resources should develop over time to support this consultation.
- CILRT should look to expand the existing project team to ensure there is capacity to lead engagement directly with landholders.
- CILRT should provide clear opportunities for landowners and volunteers to participate in defining steps ahead and ways to link individual, group and community efforts.
- CILRT should ensure ecological or technical focused plans have input from a social scientist, and social science and engagement plans have input from an ecologist.

6.3.1 Advance conversations on target species

There is a need to advance informed discussions on island around which species to focus on and when for PFC management planning. Species include possums, feral cats, rats, mice, pigs, weka, feral cattle, sheep, goats and emus, swans, geese, and hedgehogs. We encountered various opinions and varying information on these species. There was clear support for eradicating rats, possums and feral cats, the current target species. There is community support for controlling pigs but not necessarily to eradicate them. There may be support to add mice, feral sheep, feral goats, and hedgehogs to the eradication goals with the understanding that the technical feasibility, especially for mice and hedgehogs[77], needs to be researched. CILRT could specifically test adding these species, although this could result in spreading resources too thinly and loosing focus on the key species.

There is support for limits on domestic cats such as desexing, looking at how to reduce them in number by household, and to encourage whanau to desex and microchip them. CILRT should

[77] Noting that mice and hedgehogs are being added to the PF2050 strategy as research plan species (but not targets).

continue to engage with Council on regulations around domestic cats, aiming to reduce numbers and change attitudes to cat numbers per household and to microchipping.

Another important discussion is the relationships between predators before, during and after management. CILRT should open a discussion on the links between rat and mouse numbers and numbers of cats kept for their control. We heard questions about this relationship. There is also considerable interest, and potential misinformation, around cat predation following eradication of rats and mice and whether cats then shift to birds. People want to know how these complex relationships work in practice following suppression efforts, or an eradication.

- Decide if CILRT want to include feral pig management in the scope of the project and, if yes, discuss this inclusion specifically with the community, including developing a feral pig management plan.
- Decide if CILRT want to include mice, hedgehogs and feral sheep and goats in the project, and if so, discuss the inclusion and timing of these species with the community.
- CILRT should provide clear information and education on the known interactions of feral cats, mice and rats and how these interactions and patterns of prey change following suppression or eradications of each species.

6.3.2 Advance conversations on methods

Frequent comments suggested there is a lack of community knowledge about methods of suppression and eradication. There is community interest in how different methods work and what methods are best for what tasks, target species and locations, such as the northeast versus the southwest areas of Chatham Island.

Each community has its own characteristics and conversations on methods need to be tailored to them. However, all conversations on methods, especially toxins, need to ensure that information is simple, clear and open as there is potential to cause unnecessary conflicts over strongly held views. Experts on toxins need to be physically available to talk to the community alongside other methods of providing information. Suggestions on communications included creating story boards in locations, with field sessions and talks from experts on methods and their pros and cons, and results in the location. Another suggestion is to have people who engage and talk in private around controversial topics that can divide communities and result in misinformation (see 6.1.2 above).

Giving demonstrations of methods will assist such as the use of different types of traps and bait stations, and how aerial methods work. There will be a positive response to opportunities to visit areas on the ground and see actual outcomes. There is also an opportunity for citizen science where people report numbers of predators killed, trap counts and observations from the field. Local people can report on local efforts if a suitable mechanism is available to do so. There also needs to be a mechanism (online, or comments box) for reporting observations on bird species, any bykill, and predator activity by location to extend community understanding of PFC results in a systematic way.

As lessons learnt and monitoring of eradication outcomes become available from key places both in New Zealand and overseas, there will be more information to share with the community about what has happened following eradications. In addition, there may be opportunities for locals from these other communities to provide their understanding and experiences of eradications.

- CILRT should develop clear information on different toxins and their short- and long-term effects, including any risk of bykill and how they affect the wider environment such as land, and surface and coastal water.
- When presenting next steps to communities CILRT should try to include options for the community to consider and provide feedback to inform final decision making on approaches e.g. trapping vs poison, or different types of poisons and their associated methods, success rates and risks.
- CILRT should provide experts for island discussions on methods, to communicate clearly and listen to the community about their concerns and respond to them.
- CILRT could consider whether there are opportunities, virtual or physical, for the Chathams community to talk to communities where predator control is or has happened, and their actual experiences of impacts e.g. Hauraki islands, Rakiura, Lord Howe and Venotene Islands.

6.4 Integrate conservation and other sectors

6.4.1 Conservation and agriculture

This research found considerable potential for conservation to have a positive impact on farming. The limited area of public conservation land places private land, including Māori and Moriori land, at the centre of the work to restore habitats. At present, private efforts are highly fragmented as they depend on the enthusiasm and ability of individuals to maintain and protect patches of bush by fencing and initial predator control, such as elimination of pigs and cattle. Access to important coastal habitats is often across private land. To build the conversation with landowners and develop an understanding of conservation as a practical land use alongside farming, pasture development and improved stock management, requires funded efforts as part of CILRT Implementation Planning.

These conversations necessarily cover carbon farming and tourism interests as farmers need to see income streams from carbon sequestration. It also requires coordinated efforts on contiguous blocks of land to create ecological corridors and carrying capacity sufficient to allow species to relocate from one area or island to another[78].

The southwest area is an example where there is a lot of Māori land under multiple ownership, and family farms along the coast that already support conservation efforts. It is necessary to line up agreements between owners for actions such as control of feral pigs and cattle and fencing of boundaries, which requires external facilitation. For multiple owners there are court rules around who can vote and what defines permission, especially when there are many absentee owners. This area is therefore different to the northeast (Phase 1) area where coordination is much easier and imi agree on the path ahead.

Finally, control of feral farm animals, such as cattle, pigs, sheep, or goats will only be successful if their populations are not supported by ongoing releases of animals from farms. Therefore, there are links to other agencies that support farmers to ensure best practice farming, quality fencing, and suitable stock levels on farms. Secure and reliable shipping is also a critical interdependency to stock levels and farms not releasing future feral animals.

[78] social-ecological pathways are a recognised feature of scaling up biodiversity restoration, see https://data.bioheritage.nz/dataset/so6-pathways-to-ecosystem-regeneration

- CILRT should build the conversation with landowners around conservation as a practical land use alongside farming.
- CILRT should coordinate with other agencies in the agricultural space on work to control feral and farm animal populations.

6.4.2 Enhance the synergies between tourism and conservation

Section 4.5 discussed the strategic importance of tourism for diversifying the Chatham economy and creating additional full time, seasonal and part time employment. Tourism is an important strategic issue, as local social and economic value is added from conservation actions through support to air and shipping services, the use of a range of commercial accommodation, and local business activity. Tourism also helps to build awareness of conservation issues, species losses and survivals, and creates opportunities for visitors and their hosts to contribute (Leung et al. 2018).

CILRT and Tourism Chatham Islands can work together on enhanced funding opportunities and income streams through joint support for funding applications. Furthermore, nature-based tourism provides a means to obtain direct and indirect income in support of predator control and habitat restoration.

Suggestions people made for how CILRT could work with tourism to diversify and increase their income streams included:

- CILRT personnel (volunteers or paid staff) provide speakers for a fee as guides for walks, including potentially developing a specific walk on private land in the northwest area showcasing project work there
- Develop a video on PFC and show this to groups at the hotel or other locations with a CILRT representative answering questions and making a request for donations
- Obtain concession fees from tour groups who visit active PFC operations
- Encourage voluntary levies and donations to PFC or ongoing sponsorships from visitors with information pamphlets at accommodation providers
- Organise volunteer visitor labour for trapping and habitat restoration
- Provide information on PFC and ask tour groups to make donations such as support for a trap, with payment links included at points of accommodation and meals and in post tour information packages requesting ongoing support.

- CILRT to work with Tourism Chatham Islands and other partners so that PFC supports nature-based tourism alongside fishing, agriculture and carbon forestry, as part of a more sustainable economy.
- CILRT to consider ways to encourage donations or concession income for PFC via tourism operators and visitors.

6.5 Local procurement strategy

A local procurement strategy includes understanding and valuing local skills and knowledge sets and supporting businesses through procurement processes such as hiring and writing contracts that recognise local needs and conditions. Local skilled people are often working in another sector but able to work in conservation part-time or seasonally. Job descriptions and contract requests for proposals should have specific requirements for knowledge of local

working conditions, environment, culture, and health and safety appropriate to the tasks required. Findings about procurement include:

- Stock fencing – more fencing is required to protect recovering habitat from stock. There are experienced personnel and existing businesses available to do this work on island. Additional workers are available in the island workforce on a seasonal and casual basis.
- DOC contracts – islanders are interested in DOC contracts for fencing, track maintenance and similar work. Note: DOC is working to advise local companies of upcoming contracts and to support businesses to meet DOC's procurement requirements.
- Planting – wherever possible, landowners and organisations should endeavour to utilise local nurseries for plant stock. Given planting is seasonal and involves multi-year schedules, the planning for planting can include upgrading and possible expansion of local nurseries, including those run by imi and iwi.
- Responses to contracts – local people and businesses may require assistance in developing responses to requests for proposals, and for negotiating contracts, job accounting and advice on tax implications.

- CILRT should lead partners in developing a local procurement strategy for PFC that adopts a flexible and realistic approach to the procurement of goods, services and personnel to provide value for money to the project while maximising local social and economic benefits. The strategy could include policy directions and specific requirements.
- Employers should wherever possible support local job creation and business development in the acquisition of necessary labour.

6.6 Develop a conservation wānanga

The research identified a need to build skills and experience in predator work and habitat restoration to increase positive social impacts. This increase in skills is a necessary part of the islanders taking greater responsibility for conservation work through community-based leadership and by mobilising local resources. There is already transfer of skills from individual experts and technical people visiting the islands and activities such as the Science House, the work of DOC, and from research teams such as SCION. A considerable amount of technology transfer is therefore informal in nature and rather ad hoc.

Comments to the research team from members of the community, leaders and elders suggested the need to formalise upskilling through a conservation wānanga. Imi and iwi are well placed to help build training programmes in a coordinated approach with CILRT. To date the two marae have focused training on culture and language, health and education, along with conservation work, so they are a base for developing a conservation wānanga.

Some of the skills required are:

- Construction and operation of different types of traps
- Hunting skills including use of night-scope rifles
- Fencing, including work on specialist predator-proof fencing
- Propagation and nursery work
- Planting and maintenance of new plants/trees
- Use of tracking cameras and ink pads, and GIS monitoring systems
- Recognition of birds and their behaviour, breeding and feeding

- Abilities in oral presentations and visitor guiding
- Health and safety with different types of equipment or toxins
- Contract bidding and preparation
- IRD requirements for businesses, workers, self-employed and contractors.

A wider role of the wānanga is to include the community in monitoring through practical skills in pest control and training in citizen science techniques to record the presence of predators – predator activity and kills, the number and type of animals trapped, the distribution of bird species, breeding activity, etc.

- Interested parties form an action team to plan, fund and advance a conservation wānanga with imi and iwi alongside the CILRT, DOC and the Council.

6.7 Lift the national game for the Chathams

The detailed history of island administration by Rennie (2022) calls on the people of the islands to have the power to decide and act in their own hands. Too easily central government turns to paternalism and control when faced with weaknesses in island administration and management. The Chathams need the government in a proactive role as their primary development partner, especially in relation to supporting island infrastructure. Perhaps the new wind turbines at Point Durham are literally a turning point in island support and future sustainability?

With PFC very much part of the long-term national goal of PFNZ it is important that the national game is lifted for the islands through inter-agency relationships and partnerships with PFC.

PFC requires:

- direct support from DOC as the lead implementing agency of PF2050.
- technical support sympathetic to local conditions from external agency experts such as ZIP, universities, polytechnics and public research organisations
- the continuing work of MPI on the island in feral animal control, animal welfare, sustainable fisheries and marine conservation
- support for Tourism Chatham Islands and tourism infrastructure
- support for housing and social services coordination
- development of training through a conservation wānanga
- support for external and internal biosecurity measures for the Chatham islands including appropriate funding
- support for necessary physical and social infrastructure and services
- the ongoing attention and coordination of the interagency committee.

6.8 Conclusions

PFC has the potential to create significant social impacts in the Chatham Islands that are mostly beneficial to community wellbeing. These impacts will happen through the implementation of various phases and sub projects of PFC, as work is undertaken, and in the long-term, post eradication of major pests and subsequent restoration of island habitats. The most significant social impacts will result from development of a conservation sector of the economy that adds diversity to the agriculture, fishing and visitor sectors. Conservation work previously depended heavily on DOC and a small number of local trusts and individual efforts and is now more broadly driven including by many land holders, imi and iwi. With PFC, this work

is expanding along with carbon sequestration and income from carbon credits. Increased activities such as predator control and fencing along with the development of visitor facilities for nature tourism are adding to the business and employment profile of the islands. Conservation strengthens farm incomes and adds demand for air and shipping services, infrastructure and social services, increasing community viability and resilience. While there are potential negative impacts through pressure on housing, over tourism and reduced community cohesion around toxin use and animal welfare, these concerns can be managed through leadership and excellent communications.

We found PFC exhibits success factors typical of successful community-based projects in New Zealand where success commonly is based on strong local leadership and governance, collaborations, opportunities for multiple individuals and organisations to develop skills and organisational capacity, the ability to draw on multiple funding sources for sub projects over an extended time period, co-produced knowledge combining external and local expertise, and clear goals supported by an agreed, well- formulated strategy, with phases that scale up activity (Taylor &Mackay 2024).

With these observations in mind, success for PFC will result from:

- clear local benefits
- strong leadership by members of the island communities
- the involvement of multiple partners including imi and iwi, CIC, CIET, landholders, residents, volunteers, donors and visitors – from small efforts to large
- strong community backing: every trap set, bait station maintained, cat microchipped, tree planted, observation recorded and support offered will contribute to the effort
- a well-funded effort by DOC on the islands
- a strong, phased, strategy and implementation plan with clear objectives and milestones developed around core funding, plus project–specific and incidental funding
- strong communications around these plans, methods of pest suppression and eradication, the values of translocations and ecological results, and stories demonstrating success, and lessons learnt
- respected community champions who help to communicate and explain PFC as it progresses.

7 References

Agius K, Theuma N, Deidun A, Camilleri L (2019). Small islands as ecotourism destinations: a central Mediterranean perspective. Island Studies Journal: 14(2). Pp. 115–136.

Aikman H, Miskelly C (2004). Birds of the Chatham Islands. Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand. 116 p.

Algar D, Angus GJ, Brazell RI, Gilbert C, Tonkin DJ, (2003). Feral cats in paradise: focus on Cocos. Natural Museum of Natural History Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, USA.

Arbuckle GA (1971). The Chatham islands in perspective. Hicks Smith and Sons Ltd, Wellington.

Atkinson I (1996). Major habitats. In: Miskelly C (ed). The Chatham Islands: heritage and conservation. Canterbury University Press. Pp. 49–61.

Atkinson IAE (1997). Problem weeds on New Zealand islands. Science for Conservation: 45. Department of Conservation, Wellington.

Barker P (1984). Peat mining on the Chatham Islands: Proposals, context and social concerns. Studies in Rural Change: 11. University of Canterbury.

Bell EA (2019). It's not all up in the air: the development and use of ground-based rat eradication techniques in the UK. In: Veitch CR, Clout MN, Martin AR, Russell JZ, West CJ (eds). Island invasives: scaling up to meet the challenge. Occasional Paper SSC no. 62. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Pp. 79–87.

Capizzi D, Sposimo P, Sozio G, Fratini S, Zanet S, Biondo C, Romano A, Dell'Agnello F, Baccetti N, Petrassi F (2024). For birds and humans: challenges and benefits of rat eradication from an inhabited island (Ventotene, central Italy). Pest Management Science:80(11). Pp. 5510–5518.

Chatham Islands Council (2024). Navigating a way forward. Consultation document for the proposed Long-Term Plan 2024-34, Waitangi. [Accessed July 2025]

CIC (2021a). Chatham Islands Biosecurity Strategy 2021–2041. Chatham Islands Council. Waitangi, Chatham Islands. 35 p.

CIC (2021b). Chatham Islands Pest Management Plan 2021–2041. Chatham Islands Council. Waitangi, Chatham Islands. 100 p.

CIC (2025). Chatham Islands Council Monthly Newsletter. 1 May 2025.

CILRT (2023). Restoring our nature's gifts. Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust Strategy. Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust. 11 p.

CIRLT (2025). Chatham Islands Landscape Restoration Trust. www.chathamrestorationtrust.org.nz/resources [Accessed June 2025].

DOC (2018). Chatham Islands habitats and protected areas. Pamphlet, Department of Conservation, Wellington.

DOC (1999). Chatham Islands Conservation Management Strategy. Department of Conservation, Wellington.

Dickey H, Theodossiou J (2006). Who Has Two Jobs and Why? Evidence from Rural Coastal Communities in West Scotland. Agricultural Economics: 34(3). Pp. 291 –301.

DIISE (2019). The Database of Island Invasive Species Eradications, developed by Island Conservation, Coastal Conservation Action Laboratory UCSC, IUCN SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group, University of Auckland and Landcare Research New Zealand. http://diise.islandconservation.org.

Environment Southland 2019. Southland Regional Pest Management Plan 2019–2029. Environment Southland Regional Council Te Taiao Tonga.

Ruiz-Ballesteros E, del Campo Tejedor A (2024) Eradicate to Construct Nature. Goats, Rats, and Humans in Floreana (Galapagos Islands). Ethnos: 89(4). Pp. 741–760.

Harper (2022). The Feasibility of Eradicating Feral Cats and Brush-tailed Possums from Northeast Chatham Islands, New Zealand. Biodiversity Restoration Specialists Ltd. Unpublished report, Chatham Islands Council, Chatham Islands. 48 p.

Peltzer DA, Bellingham PJ, Dickie IA, Houliston G, Hulme PE, Lyver PO'B, McGlone M, Richardson SJ, Wood J (2019). Scale and complexity implications of making New Zealand predator-free by 2050. Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand: 49 (3). Pp. 412–439.

Jane GT (1989). Problems in pest control: the lessons of Pitt and Chatham islands. New Zealand Journal of Ecology: 12**. Pp.** 133 – 133.

Johnston M, Holdsworth M, Robinson S (2019). Christmas Island Cat Eradication Plan 2020-2024. Prepared for Christmas Island National Park, Parks Australia.

Kaiser GW, Taylor RH, Buck PD, Elliot JE, Howald GR, Drever MC (1997). The Langara Island seabird habitat recovery project: eradication of Norway Rats 1993–1997. Technical Report Series Number 304. Canadian Wildlife Service, Pacific and Yukon Region, British Columbia. Canada. 101 p.

Kāhui Manu Tāiko (2024). Chatham Islands' Strategy. Our islands' collective approach to priority projects. Chatham Island Council, Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust, Ngāti Mutunga o Wharekauri Iwi Trust, Hokotehi Moriori Trust.

Leung Y, Spenceley A, Hvenegaard G, Buckley R (eds.) (2018). Tourism and visitor management in protected areas: Guidelines for sustainability. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 27, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

Lawrie C, Powell J (2017). Discover and explore the Chatham Islands, First to see the sun. 3rd edn. Calders Design & Print Company, Whangarei, New Zealand. 188 p.

Lord Howe Island Board (2025) Lord Howe Island Rodent Eradication Project – Lessons Learned. Lord Howe Island Board, Lord Howe Island NSW. 120 p.

Martin Jenkins (2017). Chatham Islands economic profile.

Miskelly C (2008). Chapter 11: People who make a difference. In: Miskelly C (ed). Chatham Islands heritage and conservation. Pp.159–172.

Nelson MK, Reed G (2023). Indigenous critiques and recommendations for reclaiming nature-based solutions. PNAS Perspective: 122(29). e2315917121.

Parker KA, Patterson E, Armstrong DP, Bell M, Cooper J, Makan T, Thurley T, Welch J, Parlato EH. (2023). An assessment of sites for ecological restoration and karure / kakaruia / Chatham Island black robin (*Petroica traversi*) reintroduction on Rēkohu / Wharekauri / Chatham Island and Rangihaute / Rangiauria / Pitt Island. Wellington: Department of Conservation. 36 p.

Parkes J (2022). The Tū Mai Taonga Project: Towards removing feral cats and rodents from Aotea, Great Barrier Island. Prepared for: Ngāti Rehua-Ngātiwai ki Aotea Trust. Kurahaupo Consulting, Christchurch. 163 p.

Ratcliffe N, Bell M, Pelembe T, Boyle D, Benjamin R, White R, Godley B, Stevenson J, Sanders S (2010). The eradication of feral cats from Ascension Island and its subsequent recolonization by seabirds. Oryx: 44(1). Pp. 20–29.

Rennie H (2022). Chathams resurgent: How the islanders overcame 150 years of misrule. Fraser Books, Masterton.

Richards R (2025). Chatham Islands - Overview. Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/chatham-islands/page-1 [accessed 12 June 2025]

Rudd MB, Haist V, Large K, Webber DN, Starr PJ (2019). The 2018 Chatham Island (CRA 6) rock lobsters (*Jasus edwardsii*) stock assessment. New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2019/47.

Russell JC, Taylor CN, Aley JP (2018). Social assessment of inhabited islands for wildlife management and eradication. Australasian journal of environmental management: 25(1). Pp. 24–42.

Russell JC, Taylor CN (2019). Strategic environmental assessment for invasive species management on inhabited islands. In: Veitch CR, Clout MN, Martin AR, Russell JC. West CJ (eds). Island invasives: scaling up to meet the challenge. Occasional Paper SSC no. 62. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Pp. 692–697.

Russell KJ, Taylor CN, Balanovic JX, Aley JP, Harbrow MA, Russell JC (2017). Predator Free Rakiura Social Impact Assessment. A report for the Department of Conservation. University of Auckland, Auckland.

Russell KJ, Russell JC, Taylor CN (2025). Social-ecological assessment for remote island communities. In: Taylor CN (ed). SIA for rural resilience and wellbeing. Impact Connector 16. NZ Association for Impact Assessment.

Sanson L (2025). Chatham Islands: A land of rainbows. The Press, October 4, https://www.thepress.co.nz/nz-news/360826383/chatham-islands-land-rainbows [Accessed 4 October 2025].

StatsNZ (2024). Data sources and methodology for iwi affiliation in the 2023 Census. Retrieved from www.stats.govt.nz.

StatsNZ 2025. https://tools.summaries.stats.govt.nz/places/TA/chatham-islands-territory/vs/NZ/new-zealand [accessed 9 June 2025].

Taylor Baines (2008). Chatham Islands Economic Review 2008. Taylor Baines and Associates. Prepared for the Chatham Islands Enterprise Trust.

Taylor CN, Mackay M (2022). Social Impact Assessment: Guidelines for Thriving Communities and Regions. Building Better Homes Towns and Cities, Wellington, New Zealand.

Taylor CN, Mackay M (2024). Success factors for assessing and planning regeneration in rural areas. SIA for rural resilience and wellbeing. Impact Connector 16. NZ Association for Impact Assessment. https://www.nzaia.org.nz/impact-connector.html

Taylor CN, Russell JC, Russell KJ (2020). A strategic social impact assessment for Predator‑Free Rakiura, New Zealand, with a human–ecological approach. Socio-Ecological Practice Research: 2. Pp.161–174. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42532-020-00049-0

Tourism Chatham Islands (2022). Destination Management Plan 2022-25. https://chathamislands.co.nz/other-information/destination-planning/ [Accessed 8 October 2025]

Tū Mai Taonga (2024). Tū Mai Taonga 2024 Impact Report. Ngāti Rehua Ngātiwai ki Aotea Iwi Trust Board. Aotea, New Zealand. 31 p.

Walsh A, Wilson A, Bower H, McClelland P, Pearson J (2019). Winning the hearts and minds – proceeding to implementation of the Lord Howe Island rodent eradication project: a case study. In: Veitch CR, Clout MN, Martin AR, Russell JC, West CJ (eds). Island invasives: scaling up to meet the challenge. Occasional Paper SSC no. 62. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Pp. 522–530.

Wiltshier P, Cardow A (2006). Chatham Islands, New Zealand. In: Baldacchino G (ed) Extreme Tourism: Lessons from the World's Cold Water Islands. Routledge. London. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780080458779

8 Appendix 1: Methods

8.1 SIA project cycle

A typical approach to an SIA is to divide the work into phases – scoping, developing the baseline, assessing options, confirming the plan, monitoring and mitigation of impacts, and evaluate outcomes (Taylor & Mackay 2022). For this project, key scoping and developing the baseline tasks were undertaken from March to August 2025. These including reviewing data, reports, background information, and meetings with project partners to develop the baseline – or current status – of the ecological and social issues relating to a predator free Chathams. For further detail on the project cycle and work undertaken for this SIA please see Appendix 1.

In this case, the assessment consisted of the following overlapping phases (see details below).

- Scoping – to focus the research on the main issues of concern to people and communities (October 2020, March–August 2025).
- Developing the social-economic and ecological baselines – the starting point for understanding what is changing (June–October 2025).
- Assessing current actions and options for future stages (July–December 2025).
- Monitoring to understand ongoing impacts (proposed).
- Mitigating and managing impacts (positive and negative) for optimal social outcomes (proposed).
- Evaluating and auditing of those outcomes over time (proposed).

8.1.1 Phase 1 Scoping and developing the baseline

In October 2020, an initial scoping trip was undertaken to understand the Chathams community and geography and the context for a Predator Free Chathams. As well as visiting key places on both Chatham and Pitt Islands to understand the geography and community, some informal interviews and conversations were undertaken to understand the key topics and issues of interest for a Predator Free Chathams. This work informed the funding application for the wider SIA undertaken in 2025.

Scoping for the full SIA was undertaken from March to August 2025 and an ecological and social baseline for the Chathams developed to inform further research work. Desktop scoping of primary and secondary data included:

- Background information / literature search on social-economic background, conservation and predator work Chathams.
- Media search on social-economic issues, community attitudes, initiatives and actions towards conservation and predator free projects on the Chathams.
- Key meetings and interviews with project partners - in person and online to identify relevant information and contacts.
- Reviews of council and conservation reports and data.
- Analysis and mapping of 2023 census data.
- Review of other social-economic, business, employment and visitor data and reports.
- Review of data and reports on infrastructure, education, health, and wellbeing.

Scoping work also informed stakeholder mapping including identifying individuals and organisations and then mapping the multiple roles many individuals hold in the islands. This work then informed the developing of the fieldwork plan.

The final part of phase 1 was preparing an internal scoping report including the initial social and ecological baselines; identification of key issues; and initial observations on strategies for developing positive social outcomes and social licence against future technical options/scenarios.

8.1.2 Phase 2: Fieldwork and assessment

Phase 2 commenced in July 2025 and focused on fieldwork, assessment, and completing the report to outline recommendations for the social plan including monitoring and evaluation. Fieldwork planning included:

- Finalising field methods and interview list and question preparation - thematic approach and any area or options focus.
- Travel arrangements.
- Planning community meetings in Waitangi, Kaingaroa and Pitt Island.

In September 2025 a 2-week fieldwork trip was undertaken in the Chathams including:

- interviews and meetings of key stakeholders and organisations
- two community drop-in sessions – Waitangi and Kaingaroa
- meeting with Kaingaroa School children
- Attending Densday
- site visits
- writing up of notes
- initial analysis of issues and impacts.

In addition, further interviews and focus groups were undertaken online both before and after the fieldwork trip.

Post the fieldwork trip, further work has included:

- ongoing stakeholder interviews and focus groups using online formats
- incorporating any other updates to social baseline
- discussions with project team around technical options
- writing the report.

8.2 Census area frame and map

Table 9 and Figure 12 outlines the census area SA1 units used in the social baseline and links the descriptive names used above to the SA1 number.

Table 9: Census Area 1 (SA12023_V1) Chatham Islands areas

SA1 number	Description	Name used in this report
7027635	Island	Waitangi
7027636	Island	Southern Chatham
7027637	Inland Water	South Lake
7027638	Inlet	Lagoon
7027639	Inland Water	North Lake
7027640	Island	Pitt
7036617	Island	Te One
7036618	Island	Northern Chatham

Figure 12: Census area units (2023) sourced from StatsNZ