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Environmental policy and planning
communication in
rural Aotearoa New Zealand
focusing on
Te Tai Tokerau Northland

A dissertation
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Planning

at
Lincoln University
by
Kaya Killen Tobin

Lincoln University
2024



Rural Tai Tokerau Northland (*Photograph by Kaya Tobin*)

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Uncle Rossy – Ross Bruce Killen for sharing his passion for the Northland rural community with me. My Uncle dedicated his life to my family farm, he extensively planted and fenced our waterways and protected stands of native trees. He was very proud of where he came from and loved the rural community he was part of. Uncle Rossy was a very important part of my life and shaped the person I am today, growing up with him as a role model inspired my dissertation topic.

Abstract of a Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Planning.

Abstract

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The communication of policy and planning documents to rural communities is explored through a case study of Te Tai Tokerau Northland. Based on document analysis, surveys and interviews, this research explores how rural communities receive and interpret these documents and if there is a lack of effective communication with rural communities. The research also touches on trust as well as how this is influenced by communication around and of policy and planning.

Keywords: Communication, rural planning, relationship and trust building, Tai Tokerau/Northland, rural and urban ANZ, farmers, te reo Māori, policy and planning.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) has a strong rural identity, with many both in urban and rural areas having a strong connection to rurality (Fountaine, 2019; Bell, 1997)¹. Agriculture has a significant influence on our nation's economy and is often subject to heated political debate (Ministry for Primary Industries, 2023; Federated Farmers, n.d; Fountaine, 2019). Many people speculate about a lack of cohesion between rural and urban New Zealanders and refer to this as a 'divide' (Gabel & Knox, 2022). The lack of consensus across these demographics has been occurring for generations, with farmers often protesting against 'out of touch' regulations, among other issues (Groundswell, 2024; Claridge & Kerr, 1998; Graff, 2021). One of the most recent instances has been the widespread opposition to environmental regulation, with a new political non-governmental organisation, 'Groundswell', being prominent in protest organising (Groundswell, 2024).

It is anticipated that this research will fill a gap in knowledge around whether communication to and within rural communities is a critical issue in creating the perceived rural-urban divide. My research aims to contribute to unravelling the intricate dynamics influencing the communication of environmental policy and planning to rural communities. The research involves surveys of the rural sector as well as interviews with key industry representatives and document analysis.

By researching how this rural region receives and interprets information, this research aims to understand whether there is a failure in effective communication of policy and planning information to rural communities. If there is a failure in communication, what is causing it? Or, if there is effective communication, why is there such tension and conflict over environmental regulations?

This dissertation reviews relevant literature on rural distrust in environmental communication in ANZ. It then outlines research objectives and guiding questions that will provide the framework of the proposed research. Proposed methods are then outlined and how these methods will assist in answering the research question and sub-objective will be addressed. This is followed by results and a discussion of how these findings will fit into relevant academic literature. Lastly, conclusions are drawn and recommendations on how to improve communication with rural communities as well as future research suggestions are provided.

¹ Aotearoa, New Zealand and ANZ are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

1.1 Research question & objectives

There appears to be limited research into the communication of policy and planning documents to rural communities. Communication channels and styles are continually evolving, especially in recent times with the emergence of online media resulting in limited up-to-date research. Additionally, research into rural communication of policy and planning documents in the ANZ context appears to be minimal. Consideration of the New Zealand context, including the place of te ao Māori and te reo Māori in communication, is necessary. Thus, international research into this topic is not directly transferrable into the context of Aotearoa. The following research question guided this dissertation: *what roles, if any, do communication styles and sources have in influencing rural communities' perceptions about environmental policy and regulations?*

Alongside the aforementioned research question sub-objectives were also used to narrow down the research. Sub-objectives were structured to contextualise influences of trust in rural communities prior to identifying trusted sources/channels and why these are trusted. Firstly, this sub-objective was posed: *identify key causes of distrust from the rural community towards environmental planning and policy communication*. This assisted in understanding how rural communities view environmental policy and planning in a general sense outside of communication. Secondly, the research aimed to: *assess whether trust in environmental policy and planning documents is influenced by te reo use, trust of the science behind these documents and political affiliations*. This was chosen to unpack the influence that communication styles and sources have to rural community perceptions. The final sub-objective is: *to identify trusted media sources within the rural community with an aim to understand the preferred communication channels*. This allows for an understanding of the communication styles and sources that rural communities consume.

This research aims to contribute to the limited academic literature on the effectiveness of communication with rural communities on environmental policy and planning. For investigating these topics the case study of Te Tai Tokerau/Northland region was chosen, although questions used in data collection discussed the wider ANZ rural community. Most research participants call Northland home, with two interview participants residing outside of Northland. Thus, this research is applicable to the case study region, although it may also have the potential to have some transferable findings to other areas in a domestic context.

1.2 Introducing Te Tai Tokerau Northland

The research focuses on the Northland/Te Tai Tokerau region of Aotearoa as a case study. Northland is located at the top of ANZ, it has three Districts (Fig 1): Whangārei, Kaipara and the Far North. The District boundaries and the regional boundary collectively referred to in this document as Northland/Te Tai Tokerau are shown in Figure 1². The Northland Regional Council (NRC) has jurisdiction over this region. This region has a long rural history and is the most rural region in ANZ according to the Northland Regional Council (Northland Regional Council, n.d.). The Northland demographic is 39.9% Māori descent according to the 2023 census and the Māori population in the region has increased by 11.9% since the 2018 census (StatsNZ, 2018; StatsNZ, 2024). In summary, the Tai Tokerau region governed by NRC has three Districts, is the most rural region in ANZ and a high Māori population, making the region an interesting case study for this research.



Figure 1: Map of the Te Tai Tokerau/Northland region (Adapted from: Local Government New Zealand, 2013)

² Te Tai Tokerau and Northland are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation to refer to the local government 'Northland Region' in Figure 1.

1.3 Personal Position

My background is in environmental communications; I have a Bachelor of Commerce with a major in strategic communications and a minor in environmental studies. I am not of Māori descent and acknowledge my positionality as a Pākehā person writing about a rural community that includes a high Māori population. As a Pākehā, I cannot effectively speak to the experiences of Māori; I have attempted to overcome this by drawing on academic literature. My insider-outsider positionality also needs to be acknowledged. I am from a family farm in Northland that my family has run for over 110 years, this positions me as a member of the community I am researching. Overall, this dissertation draws on both my academic knowledge of planning and environmental communications (outsider), as well as my upbringing in a 4th generation farming family from Te Tai Tokerau (insider).

1.4 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is comprised of seven interconnected chapters. Chapter 2 – Historical Context, provides an overview of Aotearoa’s rural identity and how this has changed and evolved to the present day. Chapter 3 – Literature Review, explores relevant literature on rural New Zealand and the perceived disconnect between urban and rural. It also explores rural distrust and the potential causes of distrust in environmental policy and planning. Chapter 4 – Methodology, reviews the mixed methods approach used in order to analyse the research question and sub-objectives. It also gives insight into how the data was analysed and the limitations of the research. Chapter 5 – Results, explains key findings from the research as well as attempts to provide answers to the research questions and sub-objectives. These results are also linked to academic literature. Analysis of relevant documents, submissions and social media content are then provided. Chapter 6 – Discussion, this chapter connects literature from Chapters 2 and 3 with the results identified in Chapter 5. It discusses the connections this dissertation has with the rural context of Aotearoa. Chapter 7 – Conclusion, this chapter ties all of the chapters together and provides recommendations. It explains the results identified in Chapter 5 in terms of the research question and sub-objectives.

Chapter 2

Historical Context

2.1 Introduction

New Zealand has always had a strong rural identity; however, surprisingly, our urban population exceeded our rural population in 1911 and ANZ is one of the most urbanised countries in the world (Department of Internal Affairs, 2008; Te Ara, 1990, Federated Farmers, n.d.). Our international reputation is also attached to this rural identity as illustrated by the New Zealand Story brand proposition which features photos of rural ANZ and farming (New Zealand Story, n.d). Agriculture still remains Aotearoa's largest export industry according to the Ministry for Primary Industries (2023) which states agriculture accounts for 62.8% of ANZ's total exports. Politics and the media also continue to give significant coverage to rural communities despite farmers only being 2-3 per cent of New Zealand's overall population (Federated Farmers, n.d; Fountaine, 2019). Overall, our rural history is closely interconnected with our rural present and likely shapes the social cohesion and levels of trust in rural communities today.

2.2 Rural History

Māori lived rurally in small settlements and travelled between rohe (areas) prior to European arrival. Aotearoa's reliance on agricultural exports also occurred before colonialism. Māori were actively involved in trading produce, including selling into the Australian market (Binney et al., 2014). Trade was especially prevalent in northern ANZ around the Bay of Islands and Hokianga (Cameron, 1964). Vegetation was cleared and burnt to crop root vegetables, with kumara and potatoes being the most common crop (Cameron, 1964). Land was collectively owned and managed by iwi and hapū, with an area being cropped and then left to fallow to restore the soils (Cameron, 1964).

Europeans' arrival to ANZ brought more intensive agricultural practices and resulted in an acceleration in forest clearing and the practice of draining wetlands began (Myers et al., 2013). Early Europeans farmed on individual land titles and used fertiliser to improve soil quality as opposed to moving to a different area and leaving the land to fallow (Cameron, 1964). Family farms, where people lived and worked on their land, were the most common style, with small rural towns forming to service the nearby community in the early 1900s (Pomeroy, 2019). Social cohesion was strong with many community events such as dances, sports days, lending a hand to neighbours and high levels of volunteering (Pomeroy, 2019). These communities were predominately Pākehā, with the Town and Country Planning Act 1953 (TACPA) preventing the development of land with multiple ownership and not allowing for Papakainga (Belgrave, 2017; Pomeroy, 2019). Thus, planning provisions over this time

excluded many Māori from establishing themselves in rural communities on their whenua. In addition, Government subsidies also enabled rural development and assisted in the creation of predominately Pākehā rural communities.

However, the subsidies and focus on land development in the 1940's, 50's and 60's also resulted in significant environmental degradation (Haggerty et al., 2009). Policies and subsequent subsidies over this time encouraged tree clearing, wetland draining and land development that would have otherwise been unaffordable (Haggerty et al., 2009). Mortgages and loans were also given readily to farmers which resulted in development, increased stocking numbers and purchase of farm machinery (Binney et al., 2014; Pomeroy, 2019). However, it is important to note that these subsidies and loans were unavailable to Māori farmers. This is described by Binney et al (2014) as the creation of a 'dual economy', with Pākehā farms being subsidised into development and Māori farmland being left undeveloped due to the lack of financial aid. Government subsidies were not given to land holdings with multiple titles, resulting in most Māori land owners being excluded (Pomeroy, 2019). This inequality was further exacerbated by subsidies also not being given to individual freehold Māori titles (Pomeroy, 2019). In current times, New Zealand farmland is still reflective of these unequal policies, with Māori land often being considered marginal and largely left underdeveloped (Harmsworth & Roskruge, 2014).

The social fabric of Aotearoa's rural communities began to decline in the mid-1900's. Globalisation meant that ANZ could no longer rely on Great Britain as a guaranteed importer of ANZ exports (Ministry for Primary Industries, 2017). Alongside this, technological advancements resulted in reliance on cars as well as machinery, which enabled larger land holdings to be farmed (Brown et al., 2019). Improvements to road networks and increased car ownership allowed individuals to commute to urban areas (Pomeroy, 2019; Fountaine, 2019). As a result, small rural towns that relied on the local rural communities collapsed as people chose to commute to larger urban centres (Pomeroy, 2019; Fountaine, 2019). These factors drove farmers to amalgamate into larger land holdings (Brown et al., 2019). This, combined with rapid acceleration of urbanisation across ANZ since the early 1900's (Figure 2), significantly changed rural communities. Schools and community halls that were relied on for social cohesion were left as abandoned tributes to a bygone era of small land holdings and tight-knit communities (Pomeroy, 2019). Similarly, the same urbanisation trend occurred with Māori as they left their whenua for employment opportunities in urban centres. In 1945, Māori were still predominantly rural, with 26% of the population living in urban areas (Pomeroy, 2019). By 1986, this had drastically changed to 86% of Māori living in urban centres (Pomeroy, 2019). These changes in rural communities across Aotearoa due to change in technology, international markets and encouragement of urban centres through the TACPA 1953 was further accelerated by neoliberalism.

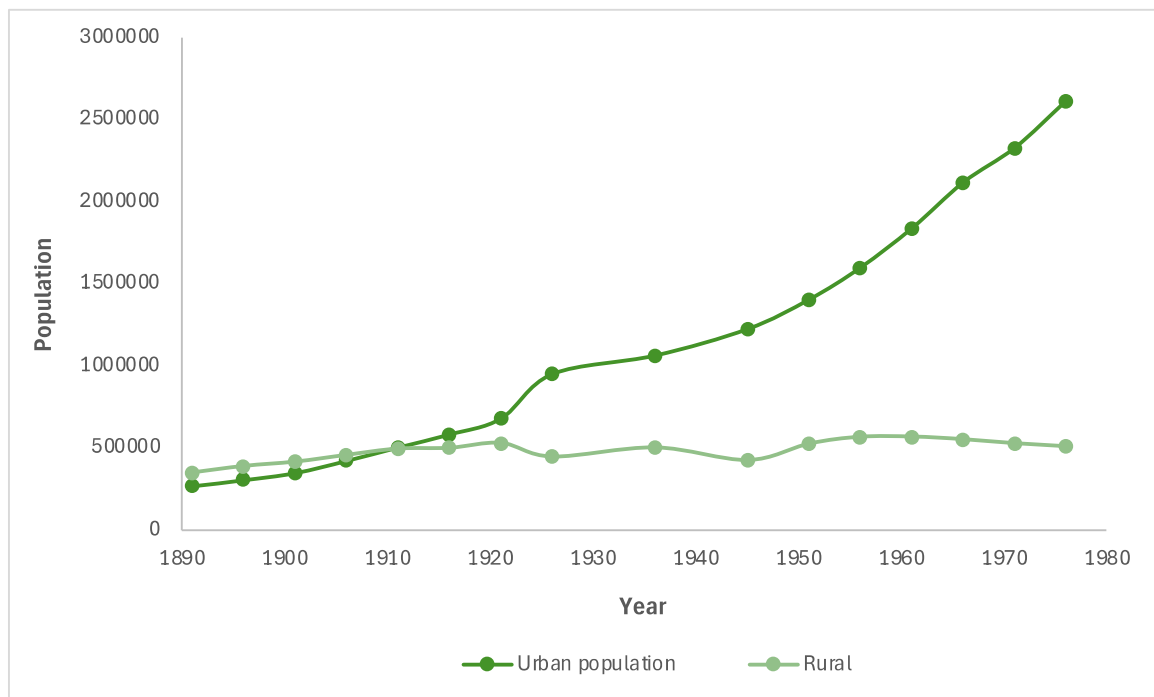


Figure 2: Urbanisation of ANZ (Data from: Schrader, 2010)

2.3 Neoliberalism in farming

Neoliberalism was implemented in ANZ by David Lange's 4th Labour Government in the 1980's and this change was referred to as 'Rogernomics' (Aimer, 2012). The overhaul of state-owned enterprises and the transition towards privatisation resulted in significant changes in rural communities (Walker & Fox, 1996). These changes included removing most subsidies to farmers which resulted in farming having to become more business and profit driven (Hunt et al., 2013). When aiming to optimise efficiency, positive environmental impacts have occurred, such as fuel-efficient machinery (Hunt et al., 2013). Rogernomics is also argued to have forced the incorporation of social and environmental morals held by international and domestic markets into the agricultural industry, that resulted in more environmentally and socially sound practices (Haggerty et al., 2009). However, there have also been some adverse environmental effects of neoliberalism in farming, such as increased large-scale dairy production supplemented with palm kernel (Gellert & D'Onofrio, 2024).

The public sector also reduced involvement in planning and let the free market have a more significant role in determining land use. This resulted in the urban form of our cities expanding and encroaching on highly productive soils and negatively impacting primary production, a phenomenon that has resulted in policy change with the National Policy Statement on Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL) coming into effect in 2022 (Ministry for the Environment, 2022). This consequence of Rogernomics has resulted in many ongoing challenges to rural communities. Increased rates due to urban sprawl and

highly productive land loss threaten the economic viability of the rural sector and place additional pressure on rural communities (Curran-Cournane et al., 2021). Overall, neoliberalism has had both positive and negative impacts on rural communities, with the effects of this governance reform still being felt by rural communities today.

2.4 Summary

Aotearoa's complex rural history is closely intertwined with the modern rural landscape and life experience of rural communities today. Rural communities remain fundamental to the economy and self-identity of New Zealanders, despite ANZ being a highly urbanised population. Neoliberalism changed the agricultural sector and has had many flow on effects for the wider rural community. Both positive and negative consequences of this transition are still being seen today. Acknowledgement of inequalities faced by Māori land owners and Māori farmers in the past is fundamental in order to understand the rural inequities in current times. Overall, modern rural communities in ANZ reflect the challenges, values and inequalities experienced by rural communities in the past.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This literature review provides insights into the research question *'what roles, if any, do communication styles and sources have in influencing rural communities' perceptions about environmental policy and regulations?'* It also examines the wider rural ANZ context and explores phrases such as the 'urban-rural divide'. Key theories, media and relevant studies are explored, allowing for research gaps in current academic literature to be identified. The main themes of defining rural, the Northland rural community, rural distrust, the urban-rural divide, rural Māori sentiment, science, trusted communication channels and working with farmers are examined. The limited available research into effective communication with the rural sector on planning and policy identified across the literature review indicates that there is an information gap that this dissertation aims to assist in filling.

3.1.1 What is rural?

Defining 'rural' in ANZ and across the world has been heavily contested, with limited agreement around the parameters of what 'rural' is (Deavers, 1992; Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000; StatsNZ, n.d.; Perry, 1994; Fountaine, 2019; Bell, 1997). An American paper titled 'what is rural?' in 1992 stated that people *'know instinctively that rural areas include small towns and open country'* and that rural assumes most people are economically involved in farming (Deavers, 1992, p188). A further definition from a Northland-based study stated rural communities in the area are becoming more diverse in the *'ethnic, class and occupational makeup of the population'* (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000, p433). This paper also commented that *'little is known about the impacts of economic and political changes upon the 'other' in rural areas,'* with the 'other' referred to being non-farming individuals within rural communities' (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000, p434). The consideration of the non-farming individuals in the rural community illustrates that rural goes beyond previous definitions that define rural to largely equate to employment in farming.

Rural has been defined on a spectrum by StatsNZ, with factors of consideration being around population sparsity, accessibility and interconnectedness (StatsNZ, n.d.). By this definition, for an area to be considered rural, it should have a low population across a large area, long drive distances to urban areas and low levels of commuting as an indication of remoteness and lack of connection to urban areas (StatsNZ, n.d.). In recent years, working from home in rural areas has become more common, with 17.2% of Northlanders working from home (StatsNZ, 2018). This is a trend that

continues to increase following the Covid-19 pandemic; with increasing remote work opportunities, a greater variety of roles outside of farming are available to people who live in rural areas (Green et al., 2020). This challenges the assumption that most rural communities are economically supported by and reliant on farms.

Rurality in ANZ is also argued by some to be idealised and romanticised (Perry, 1994; Fountaine, 2019). This attachment to the countryside is shown through shows such as *Country Calendar*, with some arguing that this idealisation is due to Aotearoa's reliance on agriculture for economic stimulus (Perry, 1994). The idealism of 'rural' has also been considered to be tied to traditional notions of 'rural' as an unchanging or nostalgic idea (Fountaine, 2019). This romanticisation of rural is a juxtaposition to many in the media who critique the agricultural industry due to concerns over environmental or animal welfare impacts (Fountaine, 2019; Cameron, 2021; Gibson, 2024). It raises the question of whether societal romanticising of rural communities impacts how 'rural' is defined. Idealisation of 'rural' is also important to consider when deciding how to best communicate with ANZ rural communities. This perception of ideal or nostalgic rural communities may indicate that 'rural' extends further than farming or geographic location and also includes shared values as well as connections to ANZ's national identity (Bell, 1997).

Demographics are also an important factor to consider and likely play a role in creating a shared belief in how to define 'rural' in ANZ. Research into the urban and rural composition in New Zealand has largely occurred in relation to healthcare. Following the 2018 census, research by Whitehead et al. (2024) looked into rural areas in Aotearoa including Northland. Demographic research found that there was a higher proportion of males in rural areas, more risk-taking behaviour, higher socioeconomic deprivation, lower educational achievement and higher environmental risk factors, all of which contribute to poor health outcomes (Whitehead et al., 2024). This dissertation takes a holistic approach to the rural experience; this includes socioeconomic factors experienced, as these also may play a role in how communication is received and interpreted by rural communities. Thus, these demographics variations between urban and rural areas should be considered when defining what 'rural' is in ANZ.

For the purpose of my dissertation, my definition of 'rural' will encompass all of those who live in rural areas, even if their occupation is not agricultural. Rural areas are considered to be areas with low populations and will include lifestyle blocks as well as those that commute to urban areas. Values associated with an attachment to the idealism of 'rural' is considered when contextualising rural in an ANZ context; however, this dissertation does not consider 'rural' to be a romantic ideal. The research will also be mindful of the demographic differences between rural and urban communities when considering how rural people interact with communication on environmental policy and planning.

3.2 Northland rural community

In the Northland region, half of the population lives rurally; however, this statistic is skewed, as it includes the Whāngarei District and Whāngarei City where a third of the population resides (Northland Regional Council, n.d.). When looking at the Far North and Kaipara Districts, rural residents account for an even greater proportion of society at, 60% and 75% rural respectively (Northland Regional Council, n.d.). In contrast, only 14% of New Zealand’s wider population lives rurally (Northland Regional Council, n.d.). The uniquely high rural demographic in Te Tai Tokerau makes this region an excellent case study to explore the dynamics of environmental communication to rural communities.

According to research into farming communities by Landcare Research (2023), 60% of rural blocks in Northland are used for commercial purposes. Rural was defined in this survey as farmers, growers, foresters and lifestyle block owners (Landcare Research, 2023). The main land use in Northland is sheep and beef which contributes to 63% of the land use (Fig. 3). Dairy farming is the next largest percentage at 15%, then horticulture at 8%; other commercial primary land uses are smaller and account for 14% as in Figure 3 (Landcare Research, 2023). This region is predominately rural with small urban centres (towns) based on the StatsNZ (n.d.) categories of towns being approximately a population of between 1000 and 20,000. Various land uses include residential, commercial, industrial and functional factors such as transport networks (StatsNZ, n.d.). Using this definition of urban centres, the only large urban centre/city in Northland is Whāngarei (StatsNZ, 2021).

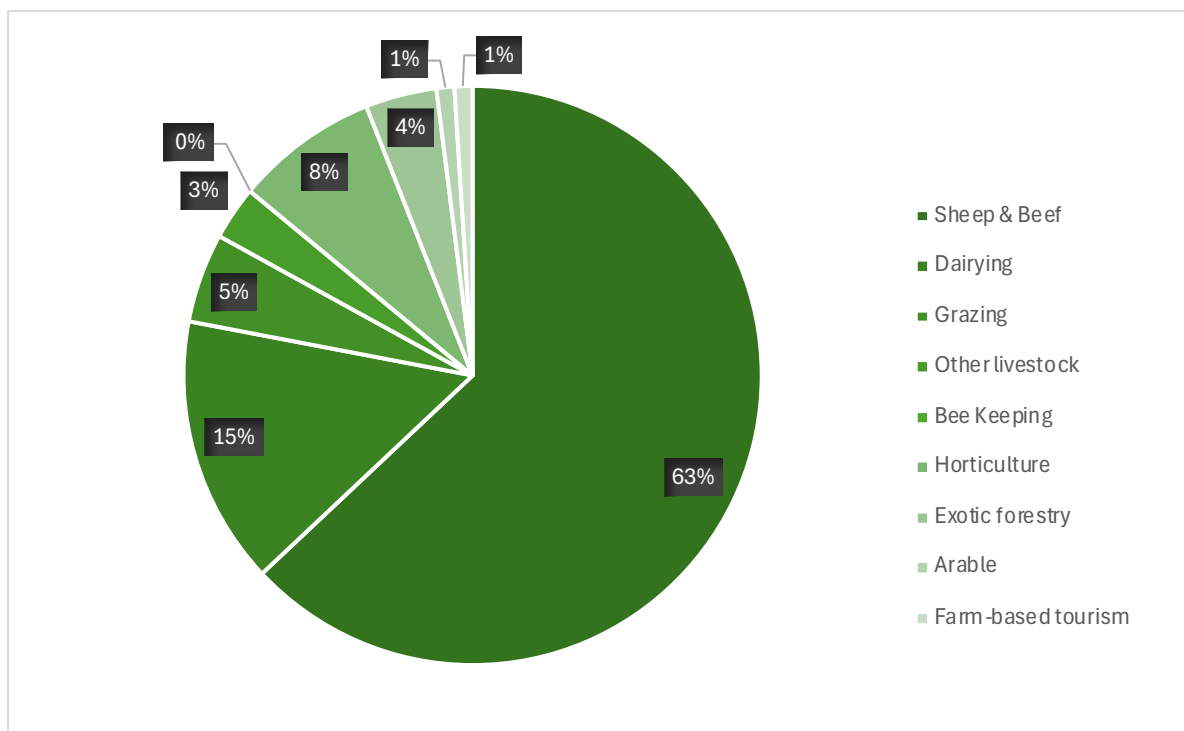


Figure 3: Primary land use in Northland (Data from: Landcare Research, 2023)

3.2.1 Northland rural Māori

According to the census in 2023, 38.7% of the Northland population are of Māori descent (StatsNZ, 2024). StatsNZ also recently released data on Māori farming; in 2022 they found that half of Māori farms were in Northland, the Bay of Plenty and Waikato (StatsNZ, 2023). The land area of Māori owned farms in 2022, in Tai Tokerau/Northland, accounts for between 6.1-11% of Māori farms across ANZ (StatsNZ, 2023). Across the Māori owned farms in Northland, beef farming was found to be the predominant land use; this is similar to the Landcare Research data that found sheep and beef to be the most common land use in Northland overall (StatsNZ, 2023; Landcare Research, 2023).

Māori land blocks are especially common in the Far North District, as shown by land block information (Fig 4) collected and mapped by Manaaki Whenua/Landcare Research in 2017. Clusters of Māori land titles are found in the Mid-North and Hokianga areas, as shown in Figure 4. This illustrates how Māori are a fundamental part of the Te Tai Tokerau rural community and should not be considered as separate as was implied by an individual interviewed in research into the case study of the Mangakahia Valley (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000). This shows how important it is to consider mana whenua and tangata whenua as part of the Northland rural community and of the farming community as discussed in Chapter 2.2. The dissertation is mindful that often stereotypes of rural communities consider 'rural' as predominately Pākehā (Belgrave, 2017; Pomeroy, 2019; Fountaine, 2019). Being aware of the actual demographics rather than presumptions of what 'rural' looks like is important when considering how communication will be received and interpreted by rural communities.



Figure 4: Māori land holdings Northland (Landcare Research, 2017)

3.3 Rural distrust

The distrust rural communities have in governments and authority has been identified as a key issue when considering why these communities do not receive environmental planning and policy communication effectively. Research by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (2023) found that 6 in 10 farmers have a lack of confidence in the people making regulations (Landcare research, 2023). This, combined with the other distrust issues identified in Figure 5, clearly shows how this distrust is multifaceted. Most of the concerns raised relate to regulation and regulators. Planning, as well as the wider environmental industry, likely falls under regulators, with policy likely being considered as regulations.



Figure 5: Distrust in rural / farming ANZ (Landcare Research, 2023)

A survey conducted in July 2023 by Federated Farmers found that overall rural confidence is at “a new record low” (Federated Farmers, 2023). Confidence is considered to be impacted due to a range of factors, including the economy, regulation and climate change (Federated Farmers, 2023). This report went on to critique policies such as the clean car rebate, freshwater regulations, significant natural areas and Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) reform (Federated Farmers, 2023). Federated Farmers and the rural community that it represents wanted changes or removal of many policy and planning documents implemented by the previous Labour government. The rhetoric used in this report, such as “unworkable rules”, “red tape” and “ute tax,” are the same or very similar to the language chosen by right-wing political parties such as the National Party (Federated Farmers, 2023; National Party, 2023). It is also the same language used by Groundswell and its members (Groundswell, 2024).

The similarities in language choices brings to question who was recorded referring to these policies by colloquial terms such as a 'ute tax' first. Was it farmers who influenced political parties through lobbying which resulted in them adopting this terminology or was it political parties that influenced the rhetoric used by farmers? Regardless of who started these phrases these terms have stuck and become common rhetoric in the media, politics and among farming communities. Overall, this shows a strong level of distrust in environmental policy and planning; this distrust is likely to have negative implications to the effectiveness of communication.

3.3.1 Groundswell

Organisations such as 'Groundswell' illustrate that there is significant distrust present in rural communities across Aotearoa. Groundswell claims to be a "*grassroots volunteer-driven advocacy group*" that aims to "*stand up against unworkable regulations*" (Groundswell, 2024). The organisation states these regulations unfairly impact farmers and rural communities (Groundswell, 2024). This movement has involved country-wide protests and has over 100,000 people signed up to a weekly newsletter (Kelly, 2023). The ideals held by what have been described as "*fringe*" attendees of Groundswell have strong links to Trump ideology, Covid-19 conspiracies and far alt-right groups, according to research into the Canterbury farming community (Brown, 2023; NZ Herald, 2021). However, two leaders of Groundswell (McKenzie and Campbell) maintain that they are not climate change deniers and say their protests have been "*hijacked*" by attendees with views they do not agree with (NZ Herald, 2021).

It can also be argued that some of these ideas are less 'fringe' than Brown (2023) and the organisation leaders considered. The Groundswell website provides a timeline of the movement, which was started by a viral Facebook post on the 22nd of August 2020 by Mckenzie (Groundswell, 2024). This post referred to then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Labour government as being 'communist' (Groundswell, 2024). The use of this term has parallels with Trump's ideology, where liberal ideas such as environmental and social reform are often referred to as 'communism' (Kilgore, 2022). This organiser referring to the Labour government as 'communist' suggests the organisers were not entirely 'hijacked' or 'fringe'. Perhaps a more significant portion of Groundswell members hold similar views to the alt-right themselves. This idea is also highlighted by communist rhetoric in the submissions against the proposed freshwater plan change by the Northland Regional Council that closed in April 2024 as discussed further in Chapter 5 (Northland Regional Council, 2024a; Northland Regional Council, 2024b).

The unhappiness towards environmental planning and policy is clear with the founding of groups such as Groundswell. Lack of effective communication with rural communities is likely a factor in the opposition from this group, as they have identified farmers being ineffectively engaged with as a key issue (Groundswell, 2024). Groundswell (2024) considers this particularly noticeable in the development of planning and policy tools such as the National Policy Statement on Freshwater Management (NPS-FM) and National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity (NPS-IB).

3.4 Urban-rural divide?

There seems to be limited accessible academic literature on what is popularly coined by the media and politicians as the 'urban-rural divide'. Research by Massey University of 1300 rural and urban people in ANZ found that there were many commonalities between the rural and urban groups (Massey University, 2023). Commonalities between these demographics included shared concerns about the environmental impacts of farming as well as recognition of the value of farmers (Massey University, 2023). A further finding is that there was consensus that the perceived 'divide' is not driven by the groups themselves, leading to researchers disputing claims of an 'urban-rural divide' (Massey University, 2023). This brings to question if this divide is a concept that has been misconstrued by the media and politicians, as despite the limited academic literature on the 'divide' it is still often discussed in public and political contexts (O'Connor, 2018; Gabel & Knox, 2022; Walters, 2021; Massey University, 2023).

There is also non-academic research that alludes to potential reasons behind the perceived 'divide'. The NZ Herald conducted a study and surveyed 1000 individuals and asked if they thought ANZ had become more divided in recent years (Gabel & Knox, 2022). Results of this study indicate that 64% of respondents thought that there had been an increased divide in ANZ society (Gabel & Knox, 2022). Among the respondents, 37% considered economic reliance on agriculture a cause of ANZ's increased divide (Gabel & Knox, 2022). However, 70% of the same respondents, as in Figure 6, thought "*that a farming based economy is good for the future of this country*" (Gabel & Knox, 2022). These responses contradict each other and illustrate that perhaps there is a tension between economic stimulus from farming and the environmental impacts that may be perceived to cause divisiveness.

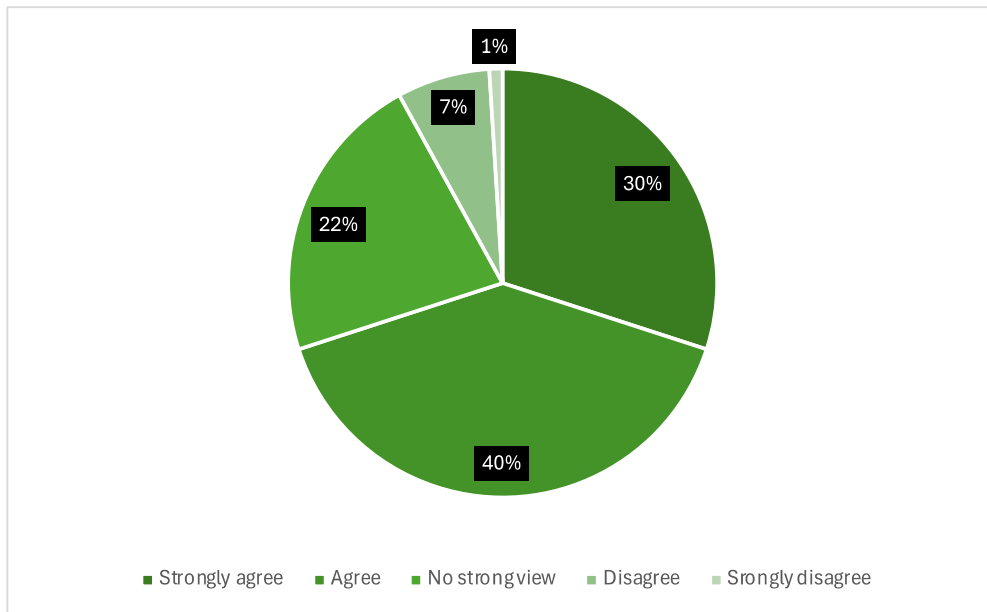


Figure 6: A farming-based economy is good for the future of this country? (Data from: Gabel & Knox, 2021)

Rhetoric used by Groundswell and politicians such as “ute tax” are often misunderstood by the public (National Party, 2023; Groundswell, 2024). In many rural settings, I have heard people take this colloquial term at face value and perceive that there is a tax specifically on utes as opposed to all high-emitting vehicles. The policy and planning instruments implemented, such as the clean car rebate (ute tax), are often reflective of global policy. Many nations, including the US, UK and European Union are implementing pro-electric vehicle initiatives (International Energy Agency, 2022). This is then often misrepresented as an isolated “war on farmers” in a domestic context by the current coalition New Zealand government, as opposed to recognising that these policies are often reflective of the global political environment (National Party, 2023). Perhaps a lack of consideration of global policy and context also exacerbates this perceived divide within ANZ, as rural communities may perceive this as a country-specific policy change.

Divisiveness from alt-right groups with Trumpism ideology has also had an influence on ANZ’s social cohesion post Covid-19 (Brown, 2023). Misinformation is at an all-time high, as is anti-science sentiment where scientific facts are undermined by conspiracies (World Economic Forum, 2022). Misinformation and divisiveness are prevalent in the media. This, combined with rhetoric used such as a ‘war on farmers’ or ‘ute tax’, also likely influences perceptions of trust towards policy and planning. Hence, divisiveness and mis-information both likely play a role in the effectiveness of communication of environmental policy and planning to rural communities as well as arguably perpetuate the idea of an ‘urban-rural divide’.

3.5 Rural Māori sentiment

In a Mangakahia case study, a Pākehā woman describes the area as having “almost no families left”, however, in the sentence before, she commented that many Māori families were returning to the area (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000, p434). The notion suggests an ‘othering’ of Māori and a lack of inclusion of indigenous people by the Pākehā rural communities. This also raises the question that perhaps rural communities associate the return of Māori to their whenua with loss of the Pākehā family farming communities. Perhaps, if present, the racism is a symptom of Pākehā farming communities feeling upset that they are losing the lifestyle that they love. It could be that instead of directing this frustration of losing farming communities towards market forces and policy changes, that have made small-scale family farms largely unviable; that instead this anger is incorrectly directed towards Māori.

Groundswell protests may also be indicative of distrust or dislike of te reo Māori use. Some participants in these events expressed themselves through signage that could be perceived as having ‘racist’ undertones (Griffith, 2021). This was interpreted by many as ‘racist’, with the media and Groundswell organisers criticising the “offensive signage” (NZ Herald, 2021; Fyfe, 2021). An example of this signage is shown in Figure 7 (Griffith, 2021). Despite the organisers of the protest disagreeing with the signs, it still indicates that there may be a connection between anti te reo sentiment and rural communities. These outspoken individuals may only be a small but vocal group within the rural community, or they may represent the views and values of a significant portion of the community. This sentiment towards te reo and Māori within the rural community more broadly may impact how communication is received and interpreted, especially when considering the communication of policy and planning documents, as these often include te reo Māori terms and phrases.

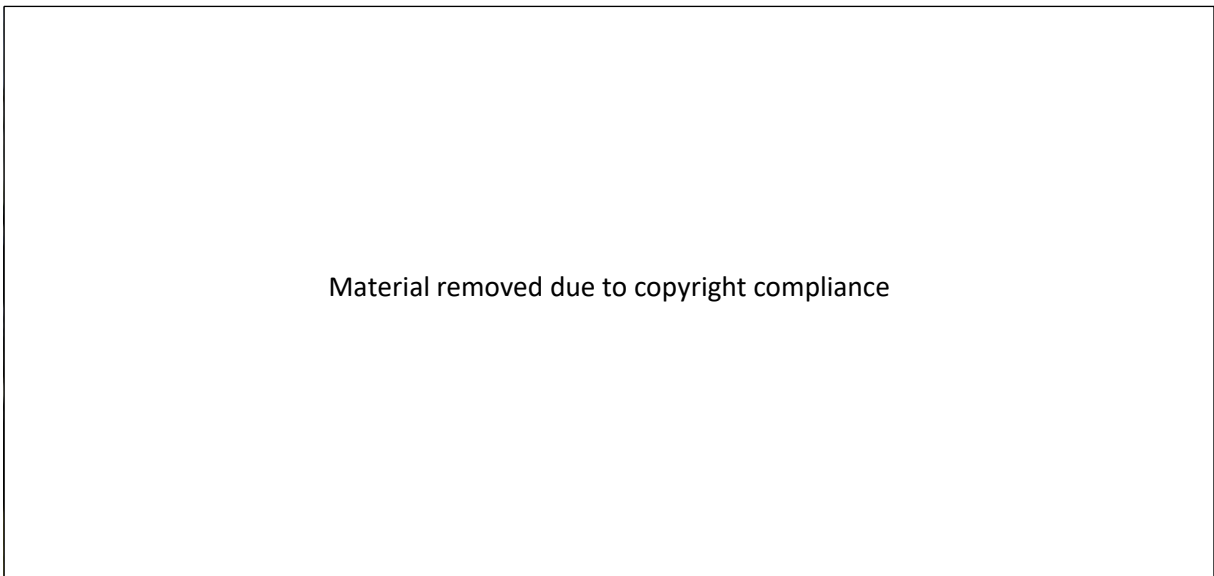


Figure 7: Groundswell protest signage about Māori language (Griffith, 2021)

3.6 Trust or lack of trust in science

In Aotearoa, 53% of people are 'not worried' or 'not very worried' about climate change according to MFE (Ministry for the Environment, 2018). This indicates that climate change is not considered a significant issue by most and also may reflect broader values regarding environmental science. Percentages drop further in rural communities, with a 2018 Colmar Brunton poll finding that these communities were 34% less likely to believe climate change was human-induced than urban counterparts (Colmar Brunton, 2018). This anti-science stance has been on the rise post-covid with increased levels of misinformation available, especially on internet platforms (Brown, 2023). Above average lack of trust in science that is present in rural communities likely plays a role in how policy and planning documents are received by this demographic.

3.7 Trusted communication channels

Research into trusted communication channels is limited. It is clear that regulators are not trusted by a significant proportion of the rural community, based on the Landcare (2023) rural survey. Planners and policy makers are considered to be regulators and thus are not considered as trustworthy by the rural community. This suggests that trusted relationships between these groups need to be formed. Media that is targeted towards rural communities, such as the Rural Weekly, also supports this hypothesis. As an example, the Northland Federated Farmers representative stated in the Rural Weekly last year that the NRC was implementing policy to have 10m setbacks from waterways and urged farmers to submit against this (Stringleman, 2023). This was factually inaccurate, instead NRC was giving effect to the NPS-FM and was consulting on setbacks with four options: 3m, 6m, 10m or 50m as part of this process (Northland Regional Council, 2024c). This indicates that perhaps distrust in regulators increases the risk of misinformation as individuals trust other in-direct sources, such as rural newspapers or rural representatives, that can be factually inaccurate. This also shows the role that trusted communication channels have to play in ensuring that accurate information on environmental policy and planning is received by rural communities.

Misinformation is also present with online rural leaders or influencers such as Matt King and 'Farmer James' who can be argued to be promoting fringe far-right views that are not founded in common science. Engagement with these farmers on social media platforms is high, with King having 34 thousand followers on Facebook and Farmer James having 15 thousand. Both farmers do not consider Covid-19 to be scientifically proven (King, 2024; James, 2022). King considers both Covid-19 and human-induced climate change to be a connected, untrue narrative (King, 2024). These beliefs are often referred to as being anti-science, though perhaps it is more accurate to say they are selective in their scientific beliefs. This is despite widespread non-political scientific evidence agreed upon by the United Nations and World Health Organisation suggesting otherwise (United Nations, 2016; World

Health Organisation, 2023). The commonality between these anti-science views is considered to be resentment over loss of freedom (Brown, 2023). This loss of freedom can be related back to policy and planning, which is often considered to be encroaching on the rights of rural communities (Federated Farmers, 2023; Groundswell, 2024). Perhaps this perceived loss of freedom can be mitigated through effective communication and engagement in policy and plan-making.

3.8 Working with farmers

Despite public perception that the rural sector is not doing enough to mitigate and avoid environmental impacts, there have been many successful collaborations with farmers and the wider rural community. Successful initiatives include the QEII National Trust, Living Water Project, Future Whenua Summit, Open Farms and Future Farmers. Collaborations discussed are not an exhaustive list and many other initiatives exist across ANZ. Projects discussed provide insights into how to successfully communicate with and work with rural communities. These insights can be utilised when considering how to best communicate policy and planning documents to rural communities. The main connecting factor across these projects is that they are led or co-led by the rural communities themselves.

The QEII National Trust is a well known initiative that has proven successful in protecting indigenous biodiversity in rural areas. All directors and the chair of this Trust are very involved in farming or own farms themselves (QEII National Trust, 2024). This has proven to be a very successful model where farmers have enabled other farmers to protect their land with more than 180,000 ha of private land protected in perpetuity under QEII (QEII National Trust, 2024). Learnings can be taken from this longstanding success story when considering how to best communicate with rural communities. QEII's focus on relationship building and rural landowners working with other rural landowners on a case-by-case basis are key learnings that can also be applied to communications with rural communities more generally.

Another example is the Living Waters project, which is a joint initiative between Fonterra and the Department of Conservation (DOC) (Living Waters, n.d.). This project focuses on improving outcomes for freshwater in the dairy industry using a catchment-based approach. In Te Tai Tokerau there is a case study on the Wairua River/Te Awa o Wairua, where Fonterra and DOC have actively worked alongside farmers to implement protection of freshwater including riparian fencing and planting (Living Waters, n.d.). Building trust is considered a core component of this project. The importance of trust in this project indicates that trust needs to exist for successful communication with rural communities.

Initiatives such as the annual Future Whenua Summit founded by a Southland family farmer also aims to build connections within rural communities and improve environmental outcomes (Future Whenua, 2024). The 2024 summit was a collaboration with Reconnecting Northland, where speakers touched on the importance of effective engagement with farmers on policy documents that influence their lives and livelihoods, such as the NPS-FM (Future Whenua, 2024; Reconnecting Northland, 2024). Reconnecting Northland aims to improve the health of the land and people, with an aim to revitalise biodiversity for future generations (Reconnecting Northland, 2024). The non-profit organisation considers itself a catalyst of change and works with the communities for holistic outcomes (Reconnecting Northland, 2024). These organisations both show the importance of collaboration, trust and in-person events when communicating to rural communities.

A further example is Open Farms, an initiative founded by a multi-generational farmer that has been created to improve the disconnect between rural and urban Aotearoa (Open Farms, n.d.). The project also alludes to the aforementioned 'urban-rural divide', which aims to stimulate connections between urban and rural ANZ. This initiative intends to bring urban people of New Zealand onto farms to experience rural life and assist in bridging the gap between these groups (Open Farms, n.d.). The Open Farms project suggests that enhancing the understanding that both rural and urban communities have of each other may be important.

Lastly, Future Farmers is an organisation that aims to bring together individuals who care about the future of farming in Aotearoa (Future Farmers, n.d.). They advocate for "*a profitable and healthy food and fibre sector*", which includes a range of projects, including healthy debate, creating a manifesto, as well as running networking events and attending speaking events (Future Farmers, n.d.). Many in this organisation are young people, with a range of people who are on farms and off farms (Future Farmers, n.d.). This non-profit illustrates that healthy dialogue and communication with rural communities could be fundamental in order to move towards a positive future for rural ANZ.

The projects outlined all empower rural communities and partner with them to achieve positive results. It is also likely that these organisations all aim to provide positive representations of their projects and influence. Thus, a more critical approach of these programmes should be considered in order for more accurate conclusions to be drawn. If applied to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation (Fig 8), these organisations demonstrate high levels of citizen power, which is considered by Arnstein's theory to be most effective (Arnstein, 1969). This suggests that rural communities are more receptive to projects that have high levels of participation as opposed to policy implementation which can often be prescriptive and lack effective engagement. Perhaps there is an opportunity to facilitate increased participation from rural communities in policy and planning in order to ensure that engagement is not tokenistic.

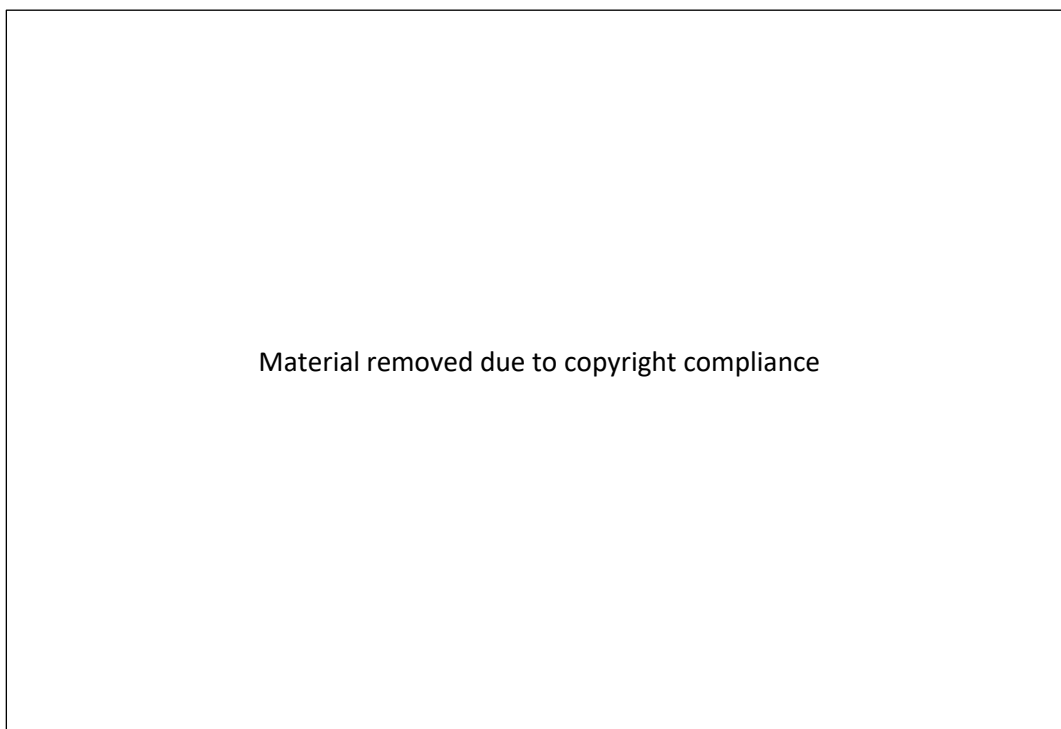


Figure 8: Ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Overall, there are many stories of rural communities protecting the environment and having positive environmental outcomes. However, the aforementioned initiatives are all founded by rural people. This raises the question if the distrust in those implementing regulations inhibits effective communication from official channels regarding policy and planning documents. Perhaps communication should not come from planners and policy makers who may be perceived as out of touch with rural ANZ; instead, this communication may be more effective coming from those with ties to the rural community.

3.9 Summary

Rural communities in ANZ and Northland are more diverse than the surface value of rural being only synonymous with agriculture and farming. Perception of the 'urban-rural divide' is reinforced by distrust in regulations, science and regulators. There is also a potential disconnect between rural Māori and rural Pākehā. These factors are perpetuated by environmental issues that significantly impact rural communities, such as freshwater pollution, climate change, highly productive land loss and indigenous biodiversity loss. Despite the identified issues regarding trust, the rural community has facilitated successful projects that mitigate environmental impacts and facilitate relationship building within ANZ's rural communities. This shows that there is room for positive change to occur if effective processes, engagement and communication channels are in place.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research consisted of a mixed methods approach of qualitative data collection supplemented by quantitative data. The methodology was chosen to answer my research question of '*what role, if any, do communication styles and sources have in influencing rural communities' perceptions about environmental policy and regulations?*'. Creating a methodology to answer research questions is considered best practice for all research; for mixed method approaches, this also involves appropriately applying qualitative and quantitative data collection to each applicable question/sub-objective (Kimmons, 2022). This research, applied both qualitative and quantitative data to the research question and sub-objectives equally without one data type taking preference over the other.

Research suggests a mixed methods approach can maximise participation, particularly when considering sensitive research topics (Heath et al, 2018). However, critics of mixed methods approaches express concerns over varied methods being analysed together (Heath, 2018). In my research, the risk of incomparable results has been limited through individual data analysis of each data set. Following surveys, interviews and document analysis, the individual datasets were compared and contrasted before collating the data and drawing conclusions. This research also followed the guideline of placing equal significance on the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research (Kimmons, 2022).

Participants' privacy is considered essential for research into sensitive or controversial research topics (Heath, 2018). This research is regarded as a sensitive topic due to livelihoods, belief systems, politics, language and trust of individuals being explored. For this reason, it was decided that all research participants should remain anonymous, including those in public-facing roles and those whose names are published in publicly accessible submissions. The decision in regards to publicly accessible submissions was also influenced due to the fact I am part of the Northland rural community and as an 'insider', I felt uncomfortable with identifying individuals who hold potentially 'racist' views, or who at their time of submission articulated these perspectives.

As discussed below, the case study is the Northland region. Methods used were document analysis, semi-structured interviews and surveys with members of the Northland rural community examining communication of environmental policy and planning documents. Qualitative research was chosen as this research is exploratory and is not trying to test a theory. This style of research was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of people's perspectives without the need for the large-scale

sample that would have been required to meaningfully test a hypothesis (Carter & Henderson, 2005). The subjective nature of how people interpret communication was also suited to the in-depth nature of the data collection methods.

Quantitative data was also used for descriptive purposes to help understand who was responding and if there were any particular readily observable patterns in the responses. Surveys were used to supplement the in-depth answers provided through interviews. This also helped to contextualise the variations between rural organisations, planners and politicians as well as the general rural community that completed the survey. Short answers were chosen to reduce the amount of time it took participants to complete surveys. Time was considered to be a barrier to participation and because of this, open-ended questions were limited in the survey.

Data collection methods varied between the interviews, in-person survey and online survey. The data collection process aimed to capture a variety of views that are in the rural community, as opposed to targeting a specific group, for example farmers. The commonality across all spoken with is that they have ties to the rural community in Northland in some capacity. Rural was defined in Chapter 3 as having a broad scope to include all of those with connections to the rural community. This research considers that a narrow definition of rural that only consists of those economically dependent on farming does not reflect the rural population in Tai Tokerau or the wider ANZ rural community. Methods outlined in the following sections reflect this broad definition, with a cross-section of the diverse rural community being included in this research.

4.2 Case study

The case-study approach was chosen as it enables in-depth study of a group/sample. However, critics of case studies argue that generalisation cannot be based from a single case study (Tsang, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2004). Limitations to generalisation is considered to be most prevalent when there are significant variables between groups (Tsang, 2014). This research is considered to be generally applicable to rural ANZ regions, which have relatively similar demographics and issues. However, demographic differences would still need to be considered when applying research to other rural regions. It is unlikely this research could be generalised to other countries due to the research touching on Māori as indigenous people of ANZ. Triangulation is a process commonly used in case studies, this is when multiple sources of data are compared to draw conclusions (Yin, 2009; Carter et al., 2014). Drawing comparisons between sources can indicate where irregularities or similarities in data occur. Similarities in data can strengthen credibility, whereas inconsistencies can suggest that a source is less reliable. Furthermore, this process helps to contextualise data within the literature, or often, as in this case, it helps to situate data in the communications and media surrounding the topic.

The mixed methods approach enables this process to occur and for data to be contextualised within the case-study.

Northland is the most rural region in ANZ (as established in Chapter 3), making it a good case study to understand rural perspectives. Other regions could have been chosen as a case study; however, Tai Tokerau was chosen due to my personal connections to the area, as well as it often being regularly involved in political rural activism. Being part of the Northland rural community assisted in arranging interviews and recruiting survey participants. Both sides of my family have called Tai Tokerau home for many generations, so most people I spoke to in the general community during the face-to-face surveys and interviews knew of my family. My families' long standing connection to this community meant that many appeared to be, or said that they felt more comfortable to speak with me as opposed to an unknown individual.

Most of the tangata whenua spoken to during the in-person survey knew of my step great grandmother who was a well-known iwi leader. My family also owned and operated the local plumbing company called 'Tobin Plumbers' for four generations, so a lot of people knew of the company and knew of my family when I introduced myself. In addition, my Mum is also a retired plant and animal researcher who worked locally and has many contacts in the agricultural sector so many knew of me because of this. My uncle also attended the Kaikohe livestock sale weekly until he passed a few months ago. Furthermore, my uncle and I were very close and most of the farmers at the saleyards had heard about me from him. He had told a lot of farmers about my research so they were willing to help when I approached them. Some joked that they had no option but to complete the survey or my uncle would haunt them. I also knew of quite a few of the survey participants as they had done contracting on my family farm, for example – shearers, fencers, foresters and stock agents. Other survey participants who did not know of me were hesitant to participate in my research initially. However, when I explained that I grew up on a farm just down the road and that my family had been farming there for over 100 years, they were much more receptive.

Long-standing political activism from the rural sector in the region also led to the selection of this area. In 1996, there was significant rural opposition to the classification by the Far North District Council (FNDC) of farmland for Significant Natural Areas (SNAs) to protect kiwi habitat (Claridge & Kerr, 1998). The SNA classification, which could be applied to private land, would have severely constrained the potential use of the land. Farmers raised concerns about ineffective mapping and considered regulations to be reducing the viability of farming. These concerns are very similar to recent concerns raised by the rural community when SNAs were proposed by FNDC in 2021 (Graff, 2021).

The recent SNA implementation to give effect to the NPS-IB was met with significant protests from farmers and the wider rural community, with thousands attending Groundswell protests against SNAs as well as other environmental regulations in towns across Northland (Graff, 2021). There was also a hikoī against FNDC SNA implementation from over 1000 iwi and hapū to the Council's headquarters in Kaikohe and 300 in Kaitaia (Johnsen, 2021). This hikoī was separate from the aforementioned Groundswell protest, due to differing values (Graff, 2021; Johnsen, 2021). Farmers were concerned about primary land uses becoming uneconomically viable (Graff, 2021). In comparison, iwi and hapū considered that this policy was proposed without effective consultation. FNDC deemed 42% of the district's land an SNA and it was considered to be another land grab³ (Johnsen, 2021). The separation between the protests against SNAs despite the crossover in the objective to have this policy not proceed is interesting. Multiple reasons may have led to this separation including signage from Groundswell being anti te reo as discussed in Chapter 3, as well as the differing reasons for protesting. This is an example of many in the rural community sharing a similar goal, but not being connected over process, ideology and activism motivation.

Other rural political activism in the area includes tangata whenua activist Pere (Chris) Huriwai from Kaikohe creating the documentary MILKED. This short film has been described as shedding light on the environmental and health impacts of the dairy industry as well as the likely changes to agriculture in the future (Taylor, 2021). Tangata whenua activism has been longstanding in the region, with Waitangi being a central place of protest against a variety of issues considered significant by Māori. Whina Cooper was also from Tai Tokerau and her Hikoī to parliament began in Northland (King, 2000). The route of the land march hikoī was symbolically followed this year in the hikoī to Waitangi on the 6th of February 2024 to protest against policies being passed by the current Government (Graaf, 2024). The often conflicting views between rural activism and tangata whenua activism converging in Tai Tokerau make this region an interesting case study.

The use of te reo in policy and planning documents and the influence this has on public trust is a sub-objective of this research. Māori rural activism combined with a high Māori population in the region also makes Northland a good case study. Alongside this, the potential othering that Scott et al (2000) found of rural tangata whenua in the Mangakahia as separate from the 'traditional' rural community can also be explored. In contrast, the use of te reo in government documents may 'other' that source of information to parts of the non-Māori rural community. Mana whenua are part of the rural community yet also separate, as shown in the recent SNA protests. The inconsistencies in connection and cohesion in Northland makes this a good case study. Diversity in views also provides the

³ Of Māori land by the Crown.

opportunity to recommend improvements on how to effectively communicate planning and policy documents to all groups within the rural community.

Overall, Tai Tokerau was chosen as a case study due to my personal connections to the region I call home as well as the region's prominent rural and tangata whenua activism. This combined with the area having the highest rural population in ANZ and one of the highest tangata whenua populations enabled the research questions to be adequately addressed.

4.3 Document analysis

Publicly accessible documents were chosen based on their relevance to the research aims. Documents analysed included public submissions, reports, policy documents, newspaper articles, social media, and academic journals, which were analysed both on a national and local level. The large variation of these documents aimed to cover a sample of both the general public and the views of rural organisations/representatives. The analysis helped to identify key themes of the research and helped to inform the semi-structured interview and survey questions.

4.3.1 Document selection

This research focuses on how policy and planning documents are communicated as well as interpreted by rural communities. Assessing trust and the influence this has on communication is also a primary objective of this research. The focus on communication also means that it was important to review the content that rural communities received. For this reason, rural-oriented newspapers such as the Farmers Weekly were analysed, as was social media and NRC consultation documentation. Submissions on the NRC Freshwater Plan Change were also reviewed to gain further insight into the perspectives held by the rural communities in relation to the research objectives. Documents or sources that were referred to commonly in the media were also chosen due to their popularity and possible influence they may have had. As were documents referenced by interview participants if considered relevant.

4.3.2 Document analysis methodology

Documents were analysed based on the themes identified in the literature review in Chapter 3. Commonalities were identified and these themes were organised based on the research sub-objectives. Key phrases and word choices were identified across the documents. The differences between communication coming from councils and communication from the public or industry representatives were also noted. Following identification, these themes and phrases were compared with the responses from interviews and survey participants. This helped to contextualise the data and

provide insight into whether the sample of participants was reflective of wider discourse across communication of policy and planning.

My approach was holistic, looking at documents as a combined piece of both written and visual content. I did not conduct a detailed image analysis of colours, lighting, angles or framing. This holistic approach also contextualised data in terms of current events such as the general election in 2023.

4.3.3 Document analysis limitations

Time was the main limitation of this data collection method. Not all data applicable to this research could be analysed due to the time frame of a dissertation. A further limitation, was my limited understanding or fluency of te reo. This meant that I was unable to read and comprehend te reo documents or social media. Instead, I had to rely on translations that likely did not manifest te ao Māori to the same extent as te reo.

4.4 Interviews

Interviews are considered to provide the richest form of data; in-person interviews are considered the best, followed by online video interviews if in-person are not possible (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). This research focuses on interpretation and trust, both topics that require an in-depth understanding to draw conclusions. Academic literature on methodology suggests that interviews are the best method to approach in-depth sensitive topics (Heath et al., 2018). It is also considered best practice for research on sensitive topics to build a rapport between the researcher and participant (Dickson-Swift et al, 2009). A variety of techniques discussed in the following sections were used to build trust and rapport.

A mixture of face-to-face interviews and online interviews with Microsoft Teams were undertaken. A total of ten interviews were conducted, four of which were completed in person and the remaining six were via Microsoft Teams. All interview participants, except for two, call the Northland region home. Participants included, central and local government politicians, tangata whenua, a vet, farmers, a stock agent, as well as a spokesperson from QEII Trust, Federated Farmers and Future Farmers.

4.4.1 Interview questions

The interview began with a general question about the participants connection to the Tai Tokerau region to make the interview participant's feel more comfortable. Ten in-depth questions relating to the research followed this. The final question ended on a positive note, asking how communication of policy/planning can be improved. This aimed to leave interviewees in a hopeful and positive mood as well as address the research objective. Interview questions can be found in Appendix A. These questions were used to guide the conversation. Alongside these, additional questions were asked as

probing questions. I also provided space at the beginning and end of the korero for participants to ask me questions.

4.4.2 Interview participant selection

Interview participants were selected based on their connections to the rural community, with participants representing the various perspectives present. Further criteria for choosing participants were their relationship with Tai Tokerau and their involvement in the rural community (e.g. Federated Farmers). The selection also aimed to choose individuals that were not expected to have the same ideology. This approach was taken to see if there were similarities in responses that could be utilised to improve communication of policy and planning documents to rural communities.

Recruitment tactics varied between phone calls and emails. These interactions explained the research and what participant involvement would entail. Due to their roles as media spokespeople for their organisations or the community, it was easy to identify the participants. Alongside this, many of the individuals interviewed knew of myself or of my family. This appeared to help when approaching those individuals, as the initial conversation would usually start by placing me in context within my family connections to the area.

Where individuals could not be pre-identified I emailed relevant organisations' inquiry offices and used follow-up emails and phone calls if the initial approach received no response. If a contact number could be found, participants were called to gauge initial interest, with a follow-up email that had the research information sheet (RIS) and consent form attached. In the case of the central government politicians I also communicated with the applicable secretaries via email and phone to schedule suitable times for an interview. All participants consented to have the interview recorded either via Microsoft Teams automatic transcription (online interviews) or through the Voice memo on my iPhone (in-person interviews).

4.4.3 Interview method

Interviews were structured to understand the perspectives and feelings towards communication of environmental policy and planning. It became apparent in interviews and surveys that many rural participants are intrinsically connected to their land. This made some of the questions very personal, so interviews were aimed to be relaxed and conversational. Interview participants were briefed about the research and refreshed on the research information sheet and consent form prior to starting the interview. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and my background before starting the interview. This helped to make individuals feel comfortable and facilitate the interviews in a friendly way. The trust that interview participants had in me, increased the pressure I felt in ensuring that this research was as in-depth as possible within time constraints. It

is also possible that these more conversational dialogues resulted in additional information being divulged that may not have been discussed with an 'outsider'.

The style of interview was semi-structured as it enabled a natural flow through the meeting, as opposed to the rigid nature of structured interviews. Due to the topic being a current political issue and the themes discussed in the interview often focusing on trust, it was important to ensure that the interviewees felt relaxed during the interview. The loose structure of the interview enabled key themes to be discussed while allowing participants' ideas to flow naturally. Having a relaxed tone and structure also helped me to notice inflections, emotions and meaning behind the words used by participants. Notes were taken during all interviews and were elaborated on further after the interview while it was still fresh in my mind. I also wrote down non-verbal cues in my notes, such as eye rolls or fidgeting.

Most of the interviews were around 45 minutes, with slight variation depending on the depth of discussion and the individual's availability. The shortest interview was 32 minutes and the longest was 1 hour and 5 minutes. The central government politician interviews were notably shorter due to personal assistants scheduling meetings for 30 minutes when I stated that the interviews were likely to take 30 minutes to an hour. However, all of these politicians went slightly over the scheduled time. It is noted that these times included preamble and general conversation that did not relate to this research.

Face-to-face interviews were the richest form of data collection, as alongside verbal responses, I was able to notice participants' non-verbal cues. Four of the interviews were completed face-to-face. The non-verbal cues allowed for a more well-rounded interview process. In-person interviews occurred at a range of locations – one was on my family farm, two were in cafes in Kaikohe and Kerikeri and one was on a participant's farm. These interviews were recorded using the voice memo app on my iPhone and Turbo-scribe was used for transcribing the voice notes⁴.

The remaining five interviews were completed via Microsoft Teams due to the participants being out of Northland at the time of the interview or due to sickness. These interviews were recorded using the automatic record and transcription function on Microsoft Teams⁵. The transcriptions were referred to when taking quotes; however, the recording had to be listened to as well to ensure accuracy. Inaccuracy in transcription was particularly evident in te reo words and phrases. Two video interviews had issues with recording, so interview notes were relied on solely for these.

⁴ iPhone 15 Pro

⁵ Microsoft Teams version 24231.507.3099.9636

Overall, questions were tailored to ensure that the interviews were completed in a relaxed way and that rapport was built between interviewee and interviewer. These interview methods ensured that valuable and relevant data to answer the research question/sub-objectives was collected. Recordings, transcriptions and in-depth interview notes were then used for interview analysis.

4.4.4 Method for interview analysis

After interviews were completed I went back through the recordings and notes and organised my data into themes based on the applicability to my research questions. I then relistened to the recordings to select specific quotes that resonated with the research aim. I chose to transcribe my in-person interviews using the online software Turbo-scribe. Interviews via Microsoft Teams were automatically transcribed. Editing the transcriptions for clarity was required particularly around te reo words which were not picked up accurately.

Common themes across the interviews were identified based on expected themes found in the literature review in Chapter 3 to organise the data, these themes were then compared and contrasted. Some of the interview participants referred to secondary data such as reports, media sources or case studies in their answers. Additional data identified by participants was used as part of the research to provide more holistic justifications behind the perspectives participants held. This process of triangulation is used by researchers to check credibility and expand on ideas by comparing and contrasting evidence (Carter et al., 2014). However, time constraints meant that not all examples referred to by participants were researched. Examples referred to multiple times by various participants were prioritised, as were comments that appeared to contradict other evidence.

4.4.5 Interview limitations

The interviews with local government have a Far North District bias through only interviewing FNDC and not Kaipara District Council or Whangārei City Council. However, interview participants did live across both Kaipara and Far North Districts, so these areas are still represented in the research. The lack of inclusion of Whangārei district is considered to be a minimal limitation due to this region being predominately urban.

Northland Regional Council (NRC) was also not interviewed as part of this research. I reached out to them and had a scheduled interview with an elected representative; however, due to scheduling conflicts and a limited data collection timeframe an interview was not possible. Having no understanding of NRC's views aside from content in publicly available documents such as the Freshwater Plan Change is a flaw of this research.

Despite these limitations, the interviews provided in-depth data that can be used to give insight into the diverse perspectives that are present in the Northland rural community. Data collected assisted in improving the understanding of the values and perspectives held by the rural community in regard to the communication of environmental policy and planning documents. Overall, the findings can be used alongside document analysis and surveys to answer the research question and sub-objectives.

4.5 Survey

Two types of surveys were completed, in-person at the Kaikohe stock sale yards and an online survey. Short answer questions were used; this style was chosen to contextualise the in-depth interview data. Both survey methods were chosen to reach a wide audience, with data collected across both of the methods being anonymous. The in-person survey was limited to those in attendance at the sale yards, whereas the online survey was accessible to anyone in the 'NORTHLAND Farming Community NZ' Facebook page. In-person and online surveys were also chosen to ensure that social media literacy did not exclude participants.

A sample of 48 participants from the Northland rural population was engaged in the survey. The participants self-selected to be part of this research so this is not considered representative. This is considered to have a 14.2% margin of error based on Northland's rural population size in 2023⁶ (SurveyMonkey, 2024). Due to the limited statistical representation, the data collected from the surveys is not sufficient to be statistically representative of the Northland rural community. The data provides indicative views of the community; further data would be needed for statistically accurate conclusions to be drawn.

4.5.1 Survey questions

The survey was 20 questions long, with both the in-person (Appendix B) and online survey (Appendix C) having mostly the same questions. There was a slight question variation between the question sets due to a technology error. The question 'do you consider a lack of trust to be a barrier to effective communication of policy/planning documents?' was not asked in the online survey. A further inconsistency was 'who do you consider are trusted sources of news/updates on rural issues' being asked twice in the in-person survey; the double up question answers were grouped together for the results. Questions were chosen to be concise to ensure that participation was as high as possible. Most questions were multi-choice and required the participants to select their chosen answer. Eight questions were short answers, with six being open-ended answers and two questions asking participants to list an answer.

⁶ Based on StatsNZ (2023) census of the Northland population being 194,007 and 50% of these being rural (Northland Regional Council, n.d.). Rural population is therefore 97,004.

The initially proposed questions were adjusted to ensure that when printed the survey could fit on a single page, as research suggests that surveys should take between 10-15 minutes to complete to maximise response rates (Revilla & Höhne, 2020). Qualtrics software guides on survey creation also suggest that short answer questions should be limited (Qualtrics, 2024). This was kept in mind and many of the short answer questions were replaced with multi-choice questions to improve conciseness.

Survey questions began with four introduction questions to ease participants into the process. The survey also ended on a positive note, asking about how to improve communication of policy and planning documents to rural communities. This was chosen as the final question to try and to ensure the survey experience was positive for participants and allow them to feel heard.

4.5.2 Survey participant selection

Survey participant selection was far more generalised than the interview selection process, with anyone in the rural community who saw the Facebook post or who attended the Kaikohe livestock sale yard on the days I was present being invited to participate. This included shearers, foresters, horticulturalists, fencers, dairy farmers, dry stock farmers, lifestyle block owners and tangata whenua. All of those in attendance at the Kaikohe sale yards who entered the lunch rooms on the days I was in attendance, had the opportunity to participate in the in-person survey. I asked all individuals who entered the room if they would be interested in filling out a survey, including the volunteers in the kitchen. In-person survey participants were hesitant to participate in my research initially, however, as explained in 4.2, my connections to the area likely resulted in participants being more receptive.

Online survey participants were not chosen as it was based on an opt-in basis. The 'NORTHLAND Farming Community NZ' page was chosen to post into, as it has a large following of rural individuals. The page is not strictly for farming as it includes many lifestyle block owners and those who live rurally. I have also been an active member on this page as I breed Wiltshire sheep and thought people may be more likely to respond to an active user.

Four individuals also completed the survey from a rural working group. Following an interview, an interviewee suggested that some members of a farming discussion group would be interested in completing the survey. I accepted this invitation and asked if they would prefer the online or printed version. They preferred the printed version (in-person), so I emailed a copy to the interview participant to distribute to the working group. Individuals willing to participate then completed the printed survey sheet, scanned the responses and emailed it back to me.

4.5.3 Survey methodology

The following methods are split into in-person and online survey methodologies. Overall, 48 participants completed surveys across the methods. Across all methods participants were able to skip questions they did not understand or did not wish to answer.

- 23 participants completed the in-person survey.
- 21 completed the online survey.
- 4 participants from a farming discussion group also completed a print copy of the in-person survey.

In-person survey

The in-person surveys were conducted on Wednesday the 16th and 23rd of July at the Kaikohe livestock sale yard. Sale yards are locations where livestock (beef and sheep) are sold to the highest bidder, in Kaikohe this occurs weekly on Wednesdays (National Saleyards, n.d.). This sale is one of four Northland livestock saleyards, the Kaikohe sale is in-person only and does not have an online bidding option. The other livestock yard locations are in Wellsford, Kauri and Dargaville (National Saleyards, n.d.). On the first day, there were 9 survey responses. The second day had slightly higher responses of 14.

This location was chosen due to its close proximity to my family farm and due to the fact that people would likely know of me when I introduced myself at this sale. I completed the survey in the lunchrooms (red) at the Kaikohe sale; these are in a separate building from the yards (yellow) in Figure 9. The lunchrooms are small, containing a kitchen and six tables with bench seats.



Figure 9: Areal view of Kaikohe stock saleyards (Adapted from: Google Maps, 2024)

The first survey data was collected from 12pm-1pm (16th of July). I found that this time was a bit late to be arriving, as people were nearing the end of their lunches by the time I arrived and wanted to leave the lunch room and head back towards the stockyards. The following week I attended the sale from 11.30am-12.30pm (23rd of July) which was a better time as I got slightly more participants on the second day.

I wore a Lincoln University lanyard with my name on it to complete the in-person surveys. I approached tables of attendees and told each group my name, what I was studying and that I grew up on the Killen family farm 10 minutes away. I also asked if the participants had any questions about me or my research before they began the survey. This was done in an attempt to build trust between the participants and myself and to make sure that they understood the research.

I had intended to approach sale yard attendees in a systematic order from the first person to enter the room and then go in order from there, but everyone was already seated when I arrived on the 16th of July. Instead of approaching people in this order, I was recognised by people I knew, so I greeted their table first and then moved around from table to table until I had approached all attendees in the sale yard lunchroom.

I also adjusted my methodology from what I had originally intended, by having multiple participants complete surveys at the same time. I trialled doing surveys two at a time on the first day and found it was far too slow. Survey participants also did not look comfortable having me in the same room with them writing and often apologised for being slow to fill out the survey. To overcome this, I brought lots of pens the next time and introduced myself and my research to a table. Then, I handed out the survey and a pen to all those who were interested in completing a survey, before moving onto the next table. I found this was more successful as I was always talking to different tables so that people felt that I was not observing them. On the second day, I ended up getting more responses and slightly more detailed answers from participants. I kept the first set of surveys separate from the subsequent day, so that any bias introduced by altering the methods could be clearly identified.

Some in-person participants joked that the surveys felt like an exam. This suggested that they perhaps felt that there was a correct answer I was looking for. After hearing these comments, I adapted by specifying in my verbal introduction that any answers would be very helpful and that there is no right or wrong response.

On the first day, there were 9 survey responses. The second day had slightly higher responses of 14. This was likely due to the aforementioned methodology adaptations. Overall, the in-person survey data, including comments made during the survey process gave valuable insights into the views held

by the general public in the Northland rural community. These methods provided relevant data that addressed the research question and sub-objectives.

Online survey

Qualtrics was used to publish an online survey using the same questions as the in-person survey. The online survey link was posted into the 'NORTHLAND Farming Community NZ' Facebook page and the link was open from the 11th - 25th of September. The Facebook post included a brief introduction of myself and the research. This was the written equivalent of the verbal introduction I gave during the in-person survey. Over this 2 week period the post was shared back into the page after 6 days, on the 17th of September to try to increase the number of people that saw the post.

I also stated in my online survey introduction that there are no correct answers. This change did not publish properly on Qualtrics, so the first three responses to the online survey did not include this amendment. This is not considered to be a significant data discrepancy as the first three participants answered all the way through to the last question.

An adaptation from the in-person survey to the online survey was including a 'maybe' option in the online survey. When I completed the in-person survey process, I observed that many people circled both 'yes' and 'no' for answers when they were not sure and I wanted to have this option for the online participants as well.

4.5.4 Method for survey analysis

I entered the in-person and online survey data into Microsoft Excel and I differentiated the data into each data collection method (in-person day 1, in-person day 2, online and farming discussion group). When both 'yes' and 'no' were circled on the in-person survey, I considered this to mean 'maybe'. I analysed the data using Microsoft Excel to find percentages of participant responses to each question as well as to create graphs.

I reviewed the different data sets of in-person day 1, in-person day 2, online and farming discussion group. Then, I compared and contrasted the answers of each data set individually. Following the comparisons, I created data sets with all of the responses, to look for overall trends across all of the answers. Finally, I recorded the similarities and differences across the data sets for each question. The data was then analysed based on the research question and sub-objectives. The questions were then grouped together to form results for each research sub-objectives.

4.5.5 Survey limitations

The main limitation of my in-person survey is only completing surveys at one of the four stock sale yard locations in Northland. Kaikohe sale yards are based in the Far North District. Therefore, it is likely that Kaipara and Whangārei Districts are underrepresented in the in-person survey. Livestock sale attendees also likely have a bias towards those involved in the rural sector who wish to purchase livestock. However, I spoke to many rural participants who were there for the social aspect of catching up with others in the rural community. The demographic of the sale was also predominantly older individuals that appeared to be middle-aged to older adults and were mostly male.

A further limitation is that as I was surveying my own community, people who knew me or knew of me, may have censored their answers, despite reassurances that it is anonymous. It is also possible that contractors who have worked on my family farm may have felt that their answers would impact their future contracting opportunities on my family farm. However, participants were reassured that anonymity was occurring throughout this process and that no one, including myself, would know which survey sheet was theirs. A final limitation was the number of questions skipped/not answered in both surveys. Many in-person participants commented that they did not understand the policy or did not have the knowledge to answer the questions.

The limitations discussed are mainly applicable to the in-person survey, as the demographics of the online participants were not known. It is possible that age and gender bias is mitigated through the online survey, which may have included a higher number of females or youth participants. Alongside this, it is possible that the online survey participants did not know me and thus were not influenced by my potential reaction to their answers. However, due to the anonymous nature of the online survey, this is not known.

Despite the limitations, the in-person, online and working group surveys provided valuable insights into the Tai Tokerau rural community. This data is collected from the general public and helps to answer the research question and sub-objectives. It also provides a comparable data set to the interviews that are of rural representatives.

4.6 Ethics

Due to this research having a human element through surveys and interviews, the methodology was reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee. The approval number is - HEC2024-18 (see Appendix D) and this was received prior to commencing fieldwork.

4.7 Overall limitations

Limitations include, a notable gender bias across the in-person surveys and interview participants, with most participants being male. Seven out of the ten individuals interviewed were male, as well as most of the in-person survey participants. However, it is possible that the online surveys had significant engagement from women. This is an unknown due to the anonymous nature of the surveys and not having a question asking the respondent their gender identification. However, this male participant bias is not reflective of the whole rural community and can be considered a flaw of my research. The bias was further accentuated by organisations such as Rural Women not responding to my invitation to participate in my research. Overall, gender was not considered relevant as environmental policy and planning documents are communicated to the public without gender-specific approaches being applied.

A further sample bias is that the research lacked youth voices. Many farmers are older, with farmers considered to be an aging demographic (Dingle, 2019). The average age of farmers in ANZ is 47.7 years old in the 2013 census, with this age expected to continue rising due to barriers to farm ownership (Dingle, 2019). However, this only reflects farmers as opposed to the wider rural community. Those interviewed were all older industry representatives. The organisations that represent youth, such as Young Farmers, did not get back to me and thus did not participate in my research. A Future Farmers representative was the only youth voice spoken to in the interviews. However, Future Farmers do not solely provide a voice for youth. The in-person surveys also had an older audience, with only three of the surveys being completed by noticeably younger rural members. It is possible that the online survey captured a younger audience again but this is not known due to this process being anonymous.

Being unable to interview Groundswell was also a limitation of this research. I wanted to gain an understanding of this aspect of the rural community directly as opposed to only using publicly available documents to understand their views. It is possible that their lack of response to my attempts to engage them in this project is reflective of them not having a high regard of the environmental industry, planners or of university research. This negative view of planners, the regulatory industry and the wider environmental industry was raised by interview and survey participants. Perhaps this view is shared by Groundswell and thus they were not interested in engaging in this project. However, this speculation is unable to be confirmed without further research and a direct conversation or interview with this organisation.

There was a slight variation in data collection, with one question only being asked to in-person survey participants and interview participants but being missed for the online survey. A further inconsistency was the same question being asked twice in the in-person survey. Both of the responses to this question have been reported in the results. These data inconsistencies are considered minor, but it is possible that they slightly influenced the results.

A final limitation was that I only spoke with two individuals outside of the Northland case study area. Initially this research aimed to speak to both those within Tai Tokerau and individuals from the wider ANZ rural community in equal measures. Due to time constraints and the scope of this research, an ANZ wide approach was not possible.

Despite the identified limitations, the methods allowed for valuable insights into the rural community to be gained. Engaging with a diverse range of individuals through a mixed method approach allowed for an increased variety of the Tai Tokerau community to be involved. However, the aforementioned biases are acknowledged when contextualising the data within the Northland rural community. This case study sample enabled relevant data to be collected as well as assisted in answering the research question and sub-objectives.

4.8 Summary

Northland was chosen as a case study to explore how rural communities receive and interpret information regarding policy and planning. Interviews with rural community industry representatives were conducted, via MS Teams and in-person. Surveys were also conducted both in-person and online using Qualtrics survey software. Most participants were based in the Northland region with only two participants across all methods not calling Tai Tokerau home. These data collection methods were combined with document analysis of publicly accessible documents.

The use of a mixed methods approach for the case study of the Tai Tokerau rural community provided data to assist in answering the research question and sub-objectives into how communities receive and interpret information around environmental planning and policy. Despite the identified limitations, the data collected provides insight into the Northland rural community and provides an overview into communication and rural dynamics in ANZ more generally.

Chapter 5

Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results collected across the multiple methods set out in Chapter 4 - Methodology. The chapter attempts to unravel the dynamics influencing the communication of environmental policy and planning to rural communities. It explores how the Tai Tokerau rural community receives and interprets information, in an aim to understand whether there is a failure in effective communication of policy and planning documents. It discusses if a communication failure is occurring or if there is effective communication and touches on the tension and conflict over environmental regulation.

Across all data sets, nearly the same questions have been asked; this allowed for data sets to be analysed collectively and compared⁷. The interviews provided a more in-depth analysis due to the longer nature of the interaction. Data richness across the two interview methods and three survey data sets is on the continuum shown in Figure 10, with in-person interviews being the richest form of data and online surveys being the least rich form of data⁸. This is based on the communication theory by Lengel and Daft (1988) around media richness. High richness channels are recommended for complex topics as they are less likely to result in communication failures (Lengel & Daft, 1988). This literature has been elaborated on by methodology academics, who consider in-person data collection to be a rich form of data and disconnected data collection, such as online surveys, to be low on the richness scale (Heath et al., 2018).

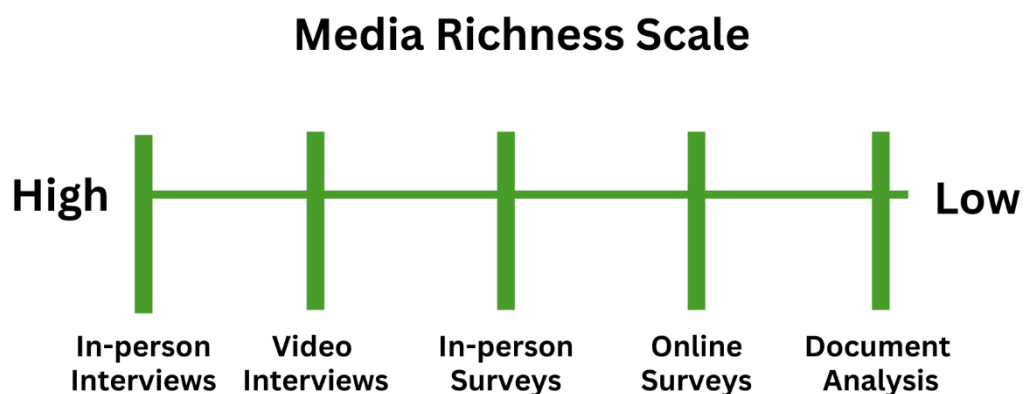


Figure 10: Media Richness Scale of Data (Adapted from Lengel & Daft, 1988; Heath et al., 2018)

⁷ Refer to Appendix A-C for questions asked to participants.

⁸ The graphic in Figure 10 has been adapted to fit the research methods used in this dissertation.

Graphs are provided throughout Chapter 5, differentiating the data sets of interviews, in-person data, online survey and the survey of a farmer's working group. Online survey data is labelled as 'online', interview data is labelled as 'interviews' and the farmer's working group is identified as 'other'. Day one of in-person survey data is shown in the graphs as 'in-person D1' and day two of in-person survey data is 'in-person D2'. A key with labels and colours is found at the bottom of each graph.

Section 5.2 discusses observations across each methodology used, such as body language with in-person and video participants as well as post interactions with the online survey. Next, in section 5.3, trust in communication is explored to establish if trust is a communication barrier. Followed by section 5.4, which discusses trust and distrust in policy. Key themes of distrust towards environmental policy and planning are then identified. Section 5.6 analyses the influence of misinformation, followed by 5.7 which identifies trusted sources. This is followed by reasons for media sources being trusted being analysed. Connections between this distrust and political divisiveness, te reo use and trust in science is then explored in section 5.9. Following this, potential improvements to the communication of environmental policy and planning will be discussed. Comparisons between data sets are made throughout to establish if there are observably significant variations in responses between methods. As well as this additional document analysis is used to supplement the discussion based on responses from participants. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of key themes across all results.

5.2 Overview & observations

Ten interviews were completed with a range of rural stakeholders and industry representatives. This comprised of four politicians – both from local and central government, a planner that works with rural communities, a veterinarian, a stock agent, a QEII representative, a Future Farmers representative and a Federated Farmers representative. Three women were interviewed, the remaining seven interviewees were men. Of those interviewed, three identified themselves as tangata whenua. However, ethnicity was not a question asked to interview participants, so it is possible that other participants are also tangata whenua. Only two of the participants do not call the Tai Tokerau area home. Four of the interviewees are also farmers, alongside having other connections with the rural sector.

All interview participants were very interested in the topic and were grateful to be part of this research. There appeared to be a genuine care across all participants around wanting to improve communication of environmental policy and planning documents to rural communities. Many noted the complexities of this issue and that improving communication will require a nuanced approach. It was observed that follow-up questions on specific points to find out further information were often deflected by participants, particularly by politicians and industry representatives. Participants were mostly quick to

critique current communication strategies and identify what is not working. In comparison, the korero around what to improve in regard to communication to rural communities going forward was a question most participants struggled with. When participants were frustrated with what they were discussing, they would often roll their eyes or exaggerate their body language. This was observed when individuals were passionate about what they were discussing and illustrates how this is a sensitive topic for many in our rural communities.

It was observed that many people skipped questions in the in-person survey and did not answer all of the questions, particularly towards the end of the survey. Perhaps, this is indicative of the survey being too long and not holding people's attention. Many also said that they did not understand the questions, or were not aware of the specifics around environmental policy. Confusion was particularly around questions regarding policy, with many asking what these policies such as the NPS-FM were. In response, I specified and gave a brief introduction of the policy and real-life implications of these policies to rural communities. Once this was communicated participants understood what the national policy statements were. However, many were not familiar with this terminology prior to the explanation. Many participants voiced that they felt they were not relevant to speak to as they were just rural people, rather than in an influential rural position. This perhaps indicates that the general rural community is not used to having their individual voices heard and often leave representatives such as Federated Farmers and others to advocate on their behalf.

The online survey Facebook post had three people 'like' the post and one comment. The first 'like' was a friend of mine who is a farmer in Northland and the second 'like' was a stranger. One of the likes and the comment was from a remote Lincoln Master of Planning (MPlan) student based in Northland, who commented saying she is in the process of completing her MPlan. The three individuals who interacted with the post may have resulted in the post being more likely to reach their friends. The lack of interactions with the post is likely due to the anonymous nature of the survey and people not wanting to be connected to their responses or perhaps the research more generally.

Due to the printed survey being distributed to the farming discussion group via email, no significant observations were recorded. The group consisted of 10 farmers and only four responses were received. This shows that most within the group did not wish to or did not have time to participate in this short survey. The data is labelled as 'other' on the following graphs and tables.

5.3 Is trust a communication barrier?

Trust and relationship building is considered by most participants to be a barrier to effective communication of environmental policy and planning documents. The graph in Figure 11, illustrates the responses to the question asking if participants consider trust/relationship building to be a barrier to effective communication of policy/planning documents⁹. It is also notable that all participants across four out of the five data sets responded to this question, all other questions in the survey were missed by some or many participants. Of the respondents 86% (32/37), considered trust a barrier, this included all interview participants. Only four of the in-person survey respondents considered that trust is not a barrier.

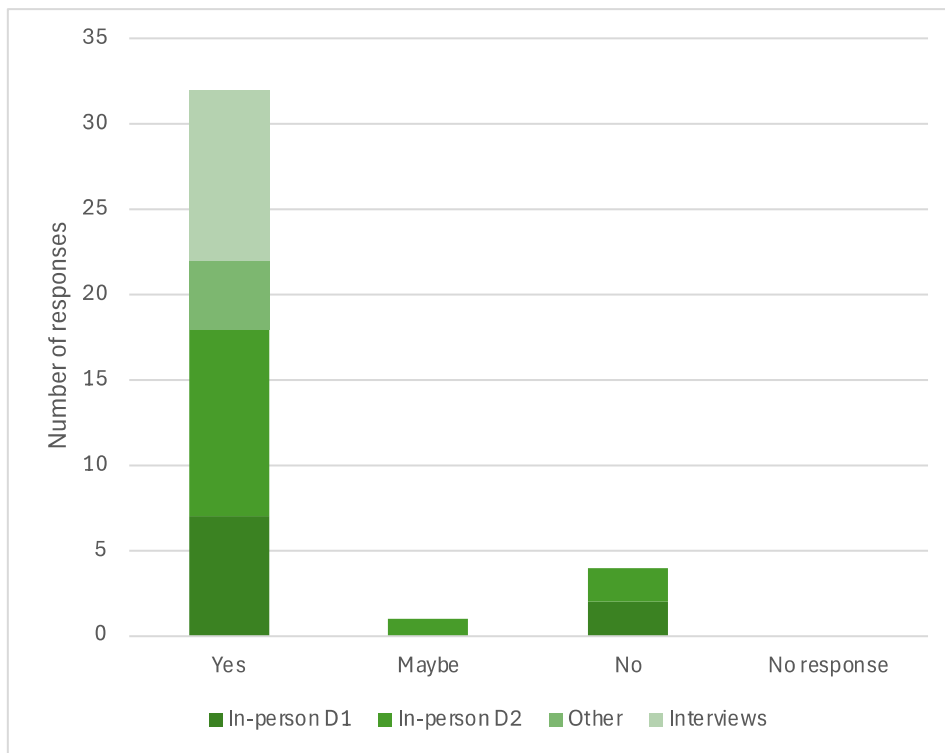


Figure 11: Is trust a communication barrier?

This illustrates that lack of trust is a perceived barrier that may need to be resolved in order to effectively communicate with rural communities. Trust is not instantly established and requires relationship building in order to be formed. Furthermore, interviewees highlighted that robust working relationships with rural communities will take time to establish. Communication literature suggests high richness communication channels should be used in order to facilitate constructive two-way

⁹ Online survey data is labelled as 'online', interview data is labelled as 'interviews', the farming discussion group is identified as 'other', day one of in-person survey data is shown in the graphs as 'in-person D1' and day two of in-person survey data is 'in-person D2'. **Note:** due to an upload error this question was not asked in the online survey.

communication that improves trust (Lengel & Daft, 1988). The importance of conversations going both ways and rural communities being part of the process was also highlighted by interview participants. This is not considered by participants to currently be occurring, with many suggesting more two-way conversations with rural communication as a potential way to improve communications going forward. Utilising communication theory around media richness and the importance of providing space for feedback on messaging received will also likely assist in improving communication with rural communities.

5.4 Trust and distrust of policy

Participants were asked if they agreed with environmental policy and planning reform under the previous Labour governments and the NPS-FM was provided as an example. Survey participants had the option to respond ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘maybe’. Most participants did not agree with the environmental reform from 2017-2023 under the previous Labour government, as in Figure 12.

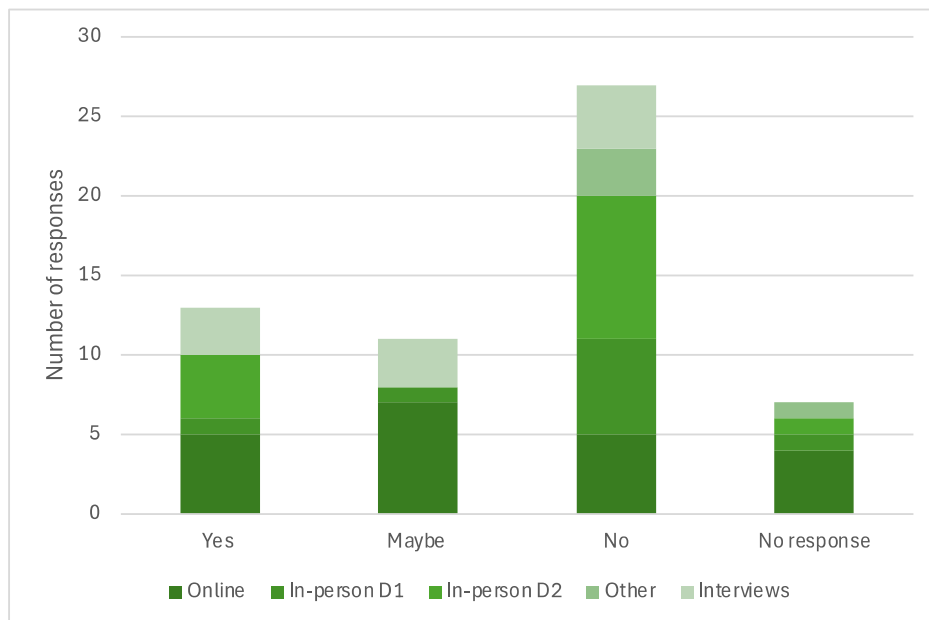


Figure 12: Responses in regards to environmental reform form 2017-23

Many in interviews and in-person surveys commented that they agreed with the intent of improving environmental outcomes but did not agree with how this was implemented in a practical sense. This was illustrated by the following interview comment:

“I don’t think anyone disagrees with the outcome of improving water quality... [but] it became impossible for industry to continue growing”
 – Participant 1

Those who responded ‘no’ or ‘maybe’ to agreeing with reform were further probed to determine if they disagreed with all of the reform or just the NPS-FM example provided. Most participants (72%) disagreed with all of the environmental reform from 2017-2023, as in the second graph in Figure 13. However, 28% of respondents only disagreed with the NPS-FM, indicating that this particular policy is more unpopular than environmental reform more generally.

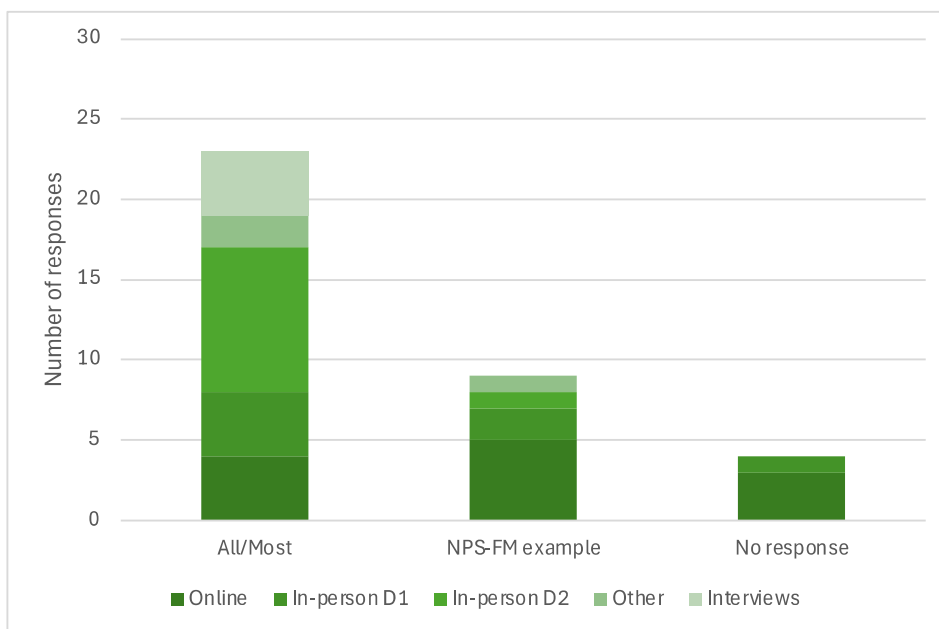


Figure 13: Do you disagree with all/most of the policy reform OR just NPS-FM example?

Comparatively, only 40% of interview participants did not agree with the environmental reform. This indicates that interview participants and the wider rural community who completed surveys do not hold the same views. An interview participant commented on how successive governments across multiple parties supported the development of te mana o te wai. This cross party support was considered to be a success by the interviewee, as was the implementation of a Māori concept:

“I thought they were really brave... It was John Key, because they turned around and said, right, okay developed a national working group. And so out of that... the concept of Te Mana o Te Wai was developed by Māori.”

– Participant 7

Exaggerated body language was observed in the interviews when discussing the policy reform under the last Labour government. Both those that were opposed to policy changes under Labour and those that are opposed to the current government’s changes reacted emphatically. Conversations observed across both days of the in-person survey also had passionate responses and comments around policy reform. This suggests that people are emotionally connected to their views around policy and politics. The emotional reactions are likely due to the impacts that policies under the RMA (1991) have on rural

lives and livelihoods. This brings to question if policy impacts rural communities to a greater extent than that of urban counterparts. Or if this perception of rural communities being impacted the most is used to justify environmental policy that does not negatively impact rural livelihoods. Another interview participant describing the past and current political situation in the following quote:

*“We're going from over regulation, to no regulation
and there needs to be a balance.”*

– Participant 4

They commented on the need for political balance in regard to environmental policy. This illustrates the connection between planning and politics and how the role of planners when implementing policy can significantly vary across election cycles. The aforementioned emotional attachment to political ideology may prevent balance across political cycles from occurring.

Interview and survey participants also referred to rural communities not feeling part of the process in policy and planning. The following interviewee quote provides insight into what can occur when trying to communicate when trust in the process is non-existent or low:

*“If someone's not feeling part of the process.
It actually doesn't matter if the policy's good,
or bad for them. That level of distrust will
prevent them from seeing what's been
put in front of them.”*

- Participant 4

This inability to comprehend the messages can be considered as a barrier that prevents successful communication from occurring (Lengel & Daft, 1988). In this sense, when applying the media richness theory, trust is considered by many participants as noise that prevents communication messages from being received as discussed further in 5.5.

5.5 Causes of distrust in policy

The data sets have been analysed for themes around why policy is not trusted by rural communities. Six themes have been found, jargon/long documents, the environmental/planning industry, the political nature of policy, distrust of science and evidence, the use and misinformation. These themes can be considered to be noise in communication theory. Noise in communication theory refers to barriers that prevent messages from being received by the intended audience (de Luca & Penco, 2006). This theory evolved from the literal interpretation of ‘noise’ as soundwaves, the impact inaccurate soundwaves has on communication was studied further leading to the concept being applied to communications more broadly (Shannon, 1948-1984; De Luca & Penco, 2006). Noise is any interference that distorts the intended message resulting in the target audience not receiving the

message (Windahl et al., 2008). Figure 14 illustrates how noise, prevents the message from travelling between the sender (council, government and planners) to the receiver (rural community) effectively.

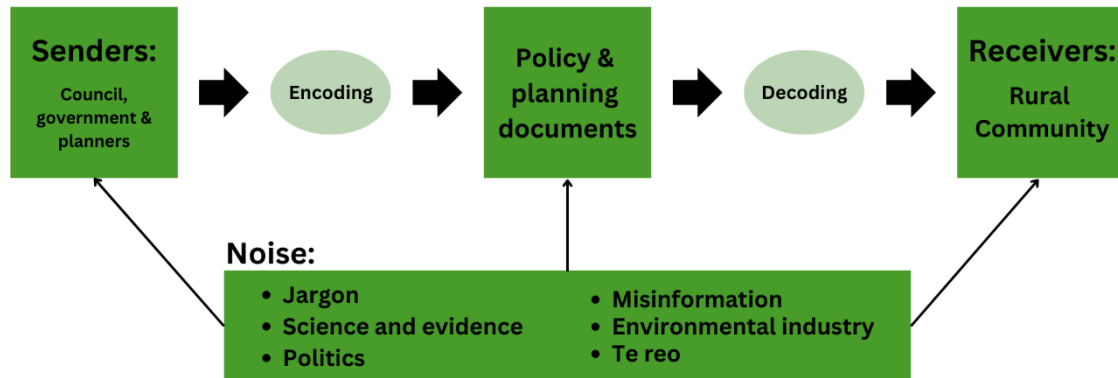


Figure 14: Influence of noise in communication (Adapted from: De Luca & Penco, 2006, p9)

A combination of these themes contribute to noise that prevents effective communication of environmental policy and planning documents from occurring. The impacts of the noise are found to be particularly noticeable with the rural public as opposed to rural representatives. Noise themes identified in Figure 14 are analysed below in no particular order.

5.5.1 Jargon-heavy, long documents

The use of jargon in policy documents was commented on by many as an access barrier to policy and planning documents. Documents used to describe policy are lengthy and in complicated language. This was a reason given by many interview and survey participants as to why the rural community are not reading these documents firsthand. This disconnect between the public and planning/policy documents is encapsulated by the following quote:

“Your average person wants to be able to understand what they're reading, so when they get confronted by policy speak, you've either got two reactions. What are they trying to hide? Or I can't understand it, so therefore, I'm going to ignore it.”

- Participant 4

This lack of the public reading these documents is discussed further in trusted media sources. Low education levels elaborated on under why media is trusted may also create a barrier to rural communities accessing planning and policy documents.

5.5.2 Science and evidence

Many participants do not trust the evidence/science used to justify policy and planning documents, with 54% responding 'no' (Figure 15) when asked if they generally trust the evidence/science referred to in documents. This distrust of evidence/science is more prominent across the survey data sets. Interviewees mostly trust (indicated by 'maybe' and 'yes' in Figure 15) the evidence/science, with only 20% (2/10) of interviewees not trusting the science and evidence in policy and planning documents. Comparatively, 63% of survey respondents do not trust the science/evidence, with only 21% of survey respondents responding that 'yes', they trust the science/evidence. Perhaps this distrust in science and evidence is connected to distrust in academics, as elaborated on further in 5.7. The term 'academics' is applied in general terms, referring to researchers in a broad sense, based on how rural participants spoken to conceptualised the term.

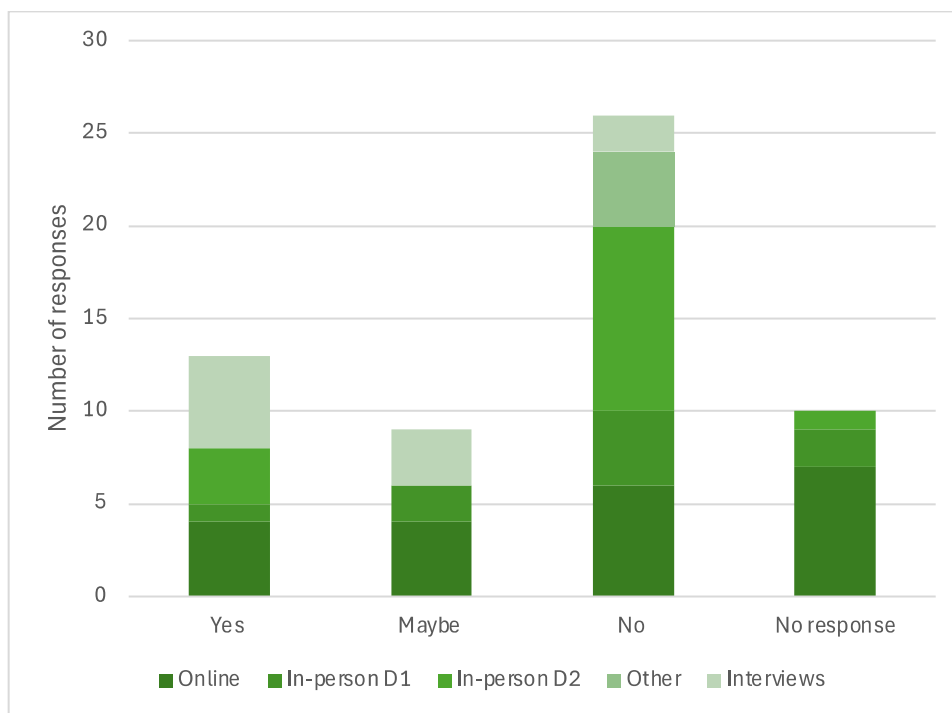


Figure 15: Do you generally trust the evidence/science behind policy/planning documents?

Biases held by individuals were also spoken of by interview participants as an influential factor in people trusting evidence. Policy and planning documents that do not align with members of the rural communities' beliefs are likely resulting in these communities not trusting the evidence and science cited by these documents. Consideration should be given to personal biases and the influence this has on trust in policy/planning, this is explored further in the discussion chapter. The following interviewee quote illustrates that people may still choose to distrust something despite being given evidence otherwise:

“The inability for people to change their view, even given hard evidence that they should reconsider.... you apply your biases when you're hearing the communication.”

- Participant 6

Conversations observed in the in-person surveys questioned the truth behind climate science, with many commenting that human-induced climate change or climate change more broadly, is untrue. This distrust in climate science was often discussed alongside disbelief in Covid-19. The connections between these aspects of distrust in science has been explored in research into Canterbury rural communities and was discussed in the Chapter 3.3.1. The following quote by one of the interview participants that is sceptical of the evidence/science gives insight into how those in the rural community may view this issue:

“Science and technology seems to have played second fiddle to stories that seem more apocryphal than factual based.”

- Participant 1

Distrust in science was also evident in the NRC NPS-FM plan change submissions, with many submitters stating that they did not trust the science. One submitter stated: *“show me the science”* - Anon1, in their submission despite the proposed plan change being supported by scientific evidence throughout (Northland Regional Council, 2024b). Many submitters made it clear they did not trust the science or the experts, with one submitter referring to those involved in resource consent processes as: *“so-called experts”* - Anon2 (Northland Regional Council, 2024b). The language in the submissions suggest that planners and policymakers are untrusted by many of the rural community in Northland that submitted on the Freshwater Management Plan Change.

5.5.3 Politics

Politics and planning are interconnected and this connection needs to be recognised when considering how policy is communicated. The connection between policy and political ideology makes environmental policy a contentious topic. Politicians campaign on ideas that are then turned into policy, so within our current system, it is not possible for planning and politics not to be connected. This makes it a challenge to differentiate these two dimensions and disassociate the inherent political element of planning and policy documents. If the political element of these documents can be removed it will likely improve trust; this is further explored in section 5.9.3.

5.5.4 Environmental industry

The word ‘environment’ was not received well by the survey participants. Facial expressions were also negative when I stated my research title. Reception of the topic improved when I explained that I am part of the Northland rural community myself. Planning was also a controversial word to many, with an interviewee expressing concern that planners have too much power. These negative reactions to the terms and associated connotations around ‘environment’ and ‘planning’ are perhaps reflective of the rural community’s negative experiences associated with these terms. Multiple interview participants expressed concerns that planners did not communicate or listen to the rural community effectively. The following quote is indicative of a very negative view towards planners:

“I find that the planners have become far too interested in perpetuating their own status.”
– Participant 1

This suggests that some in the rural community consider planners to be self-absorbed and not working with or listening to the communities that they serve. Another interviewee commented that the Northland Regional Council planners/engagement staff were confrontational or rude towards rural communities when engaging on the recent Freshwater Plan Change. This participant also felt that engagement with the rural community was often tokenistic.

5.5.5 Te Reo Māori

A high percentage of individuals were influenced by te reo use, with 20 respondents (40%) responding ‘yes’ or ‘maybe’ when asked if te reo influences trust in policy and planning documents, as in Figure 16. However, data collected indicates that the majority of participants do not consider te reo to influence trust in policy. This shows that te reo use may be a barrier or noise preventing effective communication to rural communities, to some, but not most in rural communities.

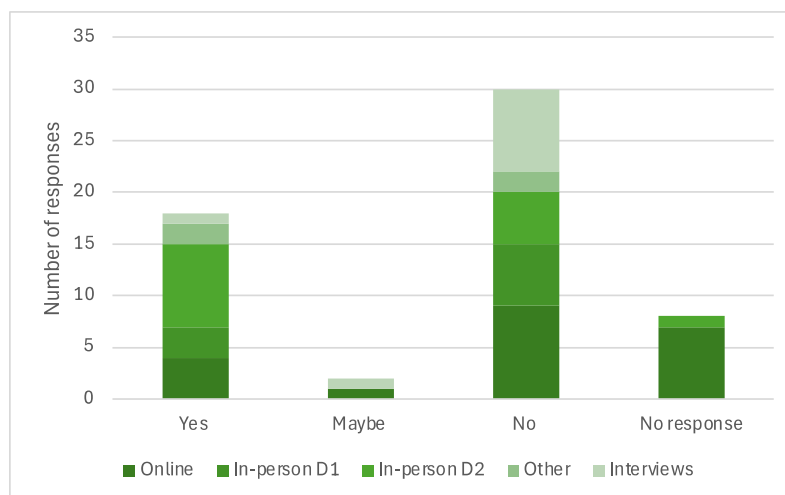


Figure 16: Does te reo influence trust in a policy?

Those who responded ‘yes’ or ‘maybe’ to te reo Māori influencing trust were encouraged to state how this influences their trust. Most participants who were influenced by te reo use considered te reo to negatively influence trust, as shown in Figure 17. Only three respondents considered te reo to have a positive influence (Fig. 17). Of respondents positively influenced, two were interview participants. One of the interview participants who considered te reo to be positive, also noted that the process behind te reo use is important. They noted the importance of te reo being used due to collaboration and consultation with mana whenua rather than tokenistic use of te reo kupu (words).

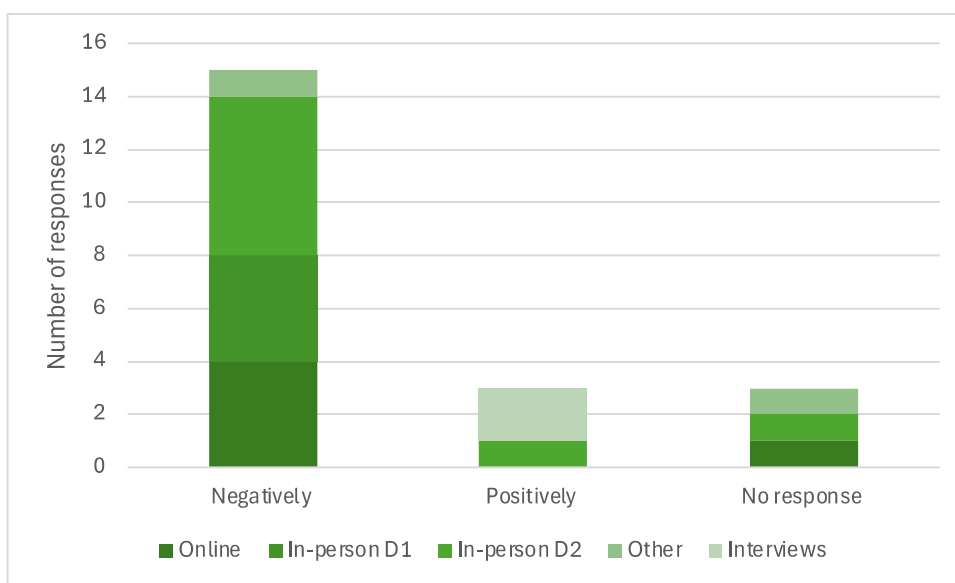


Figure 17: How does te reo influence trust in policy?

Lack of understanding of te reo was the main theme found when considering how te reo negatively influences trust. Most participants who answered that te reo negatively influenced trust stated that they did not understand or speak te reo. They commented that they could not trust something they do not understand. The graph in Figure 18, indicates that if trust is influenced by the use of te reo, then it is usually due to a lack of understanding of the language. A minority of participants consider te reo to only be for Māori and not all New Zealanders and want policy and planning documents to be for all “kiwis” rather than for iwi or Māori. An in-person survey participant considered te reo to be used to “misdirect or misinform” policy. Furthermore, another in-person survey individual stated that words in te reo reduce trust as there “should be no reference to race”.

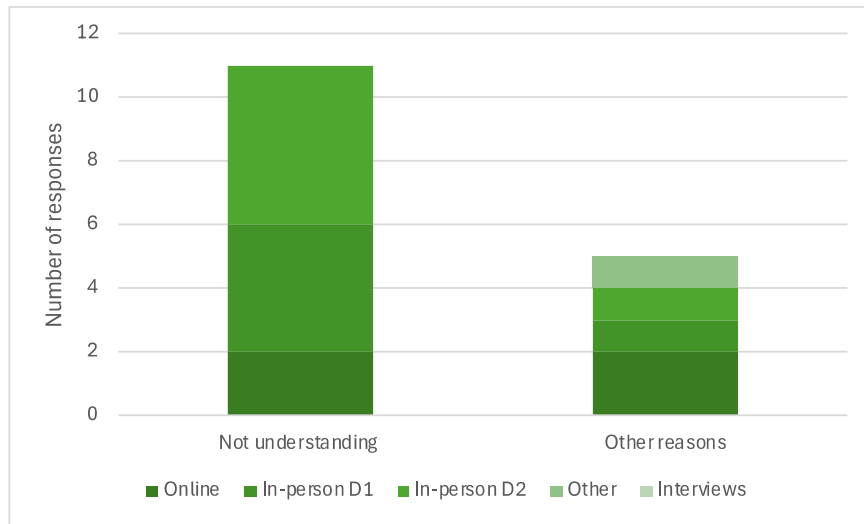


Figure 18: Types of negative influence te reo has on trust in policy

Variations can also be noticed when considering how the participant is involved in the rural community, as in Figure 19. Those who work on the land and self-identify themselves as farmers or on-farm contractors (on-land in Fig 19), are more likely to be negatively influenced by the use of te reo than those that work in the wider rural sector, such as rural representatives (off-land in Fig 19). None of those that were positively influenced by te reo identified themselves to be farmers or on-farm contractors. Many of the survey participants across the data collection methods did not specify their involvement in the rural community; if these participants' involvement in the rural sector was known, then this may impact the results.

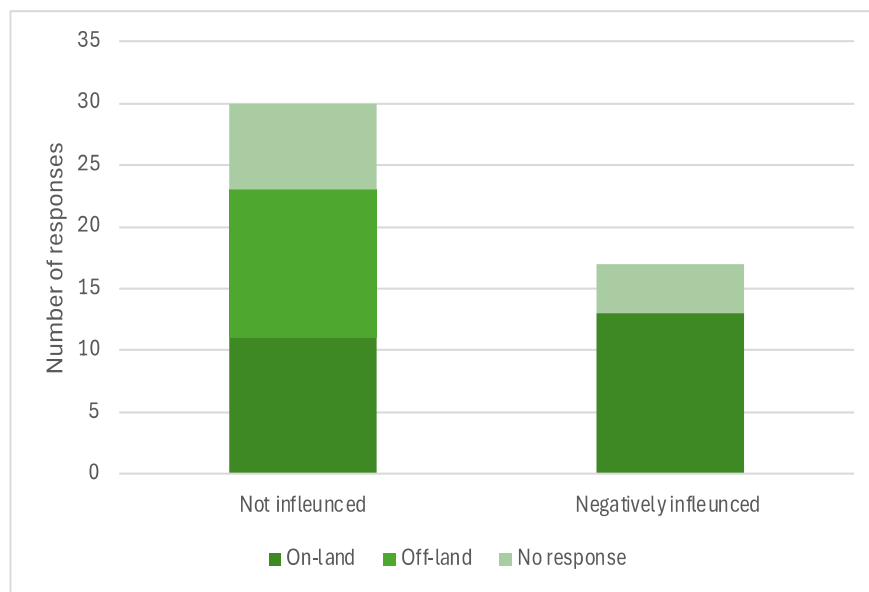


Figure 19: Influence te reo has on trust in policy based on involvement in the rural sector

Many interview participants commented that te reo use causes misunderstanding due to lack of te reo knowledge but did not consider this to impact their personal trust in policy and planning documents. However, many noted that it does influence many in the rural community that they work with. Some interview participants considered the influence of te reo among the communities they work to be negative. However, it was also noted by two interview participants that for some in the rural community, including tangata whenua, it can have a positive influence on trust. One interviewee considered it to have a positive influence on trust. Another interview participant said that it depends on whether the use of te reo is tokenistic, or a result of partnerships with Māori; their response is recorded as maybe. No interview participants considered te reo to negatively influence their personal trust in policy and planning documents.

One interview participant questioned if the lack of support from the rural sector for the NPS-FM was due to te reo being used as the fundamental concept. This participant also noted that Māori are also farmers and part of the rural community too. The following quote illustrates the potential connection between distrust in policy and te reo use:

*“Is it just the fact that it has
a Māori nom de plume?”
- Participant 7*

A minority of participants raised concerns around Māori influence, with some survey respondents saying that Māori should have less say in regard to policy and planning. A preference towards policy and planning communication being in English for all ‘Kiwis’ was suggested by one online survey participant, with the following answer given when asked how use of te reo in policy and planning documents influences trust:

*“Lose trust in it. Feel like it's
only for Maori. Not Kiwis!!”
- Anon online survey respondent*

This narrative of ‘Kiwis’ sounds similar to the rhetoric used by Don Brash in the 2006 election against Helen Clark (James, 2020). Brash used signage saying Labour was pro ‘Iwi’ and National was pro ‘Kiwi’ (James, 2020). There is irony in individuals referring to themselves using the te reo Māori word ‘Kiwi’ while critiquing use of te reo. Lack of the macron over ‘a’ in Māori may also be due to limited understanding of te reo and te ao Māori. Use of the word ‘Kiwi’ a familiar word suggests that known te reo words are more trustworthy. Or perhaps individuals pick and choose which te reo words they will and will not trust to align with their ideology.

In the recent NPS-FM consultation short submissions document compiled by NRC, Māori are singled out by many submitters as benefiting from 'race' based policies¹⁰. The short submissions document was chosen to analyse, as a quick review of the documents indicated that the public wrote most of the short answer responses, whereas, industry and organisations wrote the long answers. Most of the submissions in this document are from rural landowners or people that live rurally. Thus, these individuals fit within the aforementioned definition of 'rural' provided in Chapter 3. Many refer to this proposed plan change as 'racist' and/or 'divisive' (Northland Regional Council, 2024b). This is due to the consultation document attempting to uphold te Tiriti o Waitangi, with aspects such as, recognising tangata whenua as kaitiaki (guardians) of wai (water) and the concept of Te Mana Me Te Mauri o Te Wai.

One submission states that Te Mana Me Te Mauri o Te Wai should be removed and refers to this phrase as "*Stone-age Voodoo*"- Anon3 (Northland Regional Council, 2024b). Many of the submissions are racially charged with statements such as the: "*practice of kaitiaki is a race based policy*" – Anon4, "*grave concerns about the iwi consult component*" – Anon5, iwi are one of the: "*biggest gangs in NZ*" – Anon4 and: "*I strongly disagree to having to recognise Māori values*" – Anon6 (Northland Regional Council, 2024b). However, representatives of rural communities submissions, such as agri-businesses and Federated Farmers did not touch on removing tangata whenua consultation (Northland Regional Council, 2024a). This indicates that there is a disconnect between rural representatives/industry and the wider rural community in regard to their views towards te ao Māori. Or perhaps, representatives are deliberately avoiding words or phrases that they consider will negatively impact their reputation, and therefore, would not assist them when attempting to influence governing bodies.

5.6 Misinformation

Communication literature warns of the risk associated with the intended messages not being received accurately, especially when using communication channels that are low richness. Policy and planning documents are written documents that are not directly communicated to the public; therefore, they are low richness. This means unintended interpretations and misinformation can arise due to the disconnect between the message sender and the receiver, as shown in Figure 14. This communication disconnect likely plays a role when communicating policy and planning indirectly through documents to rural communities in ANZ.

The comments in Table 1, were recorded across data methods and fact-checked using triangulation. They illustrate possible ways misinformation can play a role in the communication of policy and planning documents. Comments like these were mostly noticed during the in-person surveys. These

¹⁰ Short submissions are defined by NRC, with the NPS-FM consultation feedback being compiled into separate feedback documents based on the submission length.

comments were recorded both formally through data collection and observed in-formally through conversations with participants. It was noticed that climate change, Covid-19 and tangata whenua involvement in planning were the main areas raised by participants. These link to the research sub-objectives on the influence science and te reo has on rural communities' perceptions of trust.

Table 1: Misinformation comments made by research participants

Comments made by participants:
Jacinda used covid to create chaos so that Black Power and Clark Gayford could deal drugs and she made up climate change too
The sea level cannot rise as no more water can be created
Climate change is a myth
There is no communication it's just full dictatorship
Brainwashing the public that farmers are ruining the planet blah blah blah

5.7 Trusted sources

Participants were asked to specify trusted media/sources for rural updates and issues. A variety of media sources were listed by participants including TV, published newspapers, online news, social media and a variety of organisations. The trusted media themes are; rural media, rural representatives, locals, no-one, industry, policy, general media and lastly academics as in Figure 20¹¹. Rural media is the most trusted communication channel and perhaps is largely overlooked when communicating with rural communities. It is also interesting to note that much of the content analysed across document analysis of the Farmers Weekly and Rural News are opinion pieces with factual explanations for policy appearing to be lacking.

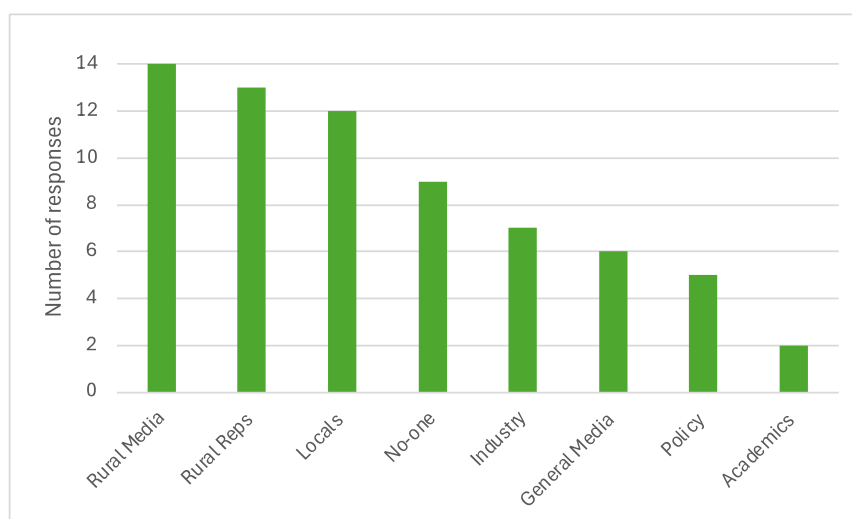


Figure 20: Themes identified across trusted sources

¹¹ Participants could respond with multiple sources, so this data does not reflect percentages of people trusting a specific source theme.

Academics are the least trusted theme identified. This brings to question if research like mine will be ignored by the rural community. It will be interesting to see if this research will be considered under the local community source, due to my position as part of the Tai Tokerau rural community, or if the academic nature of this project and my position as an academic will result in the research falling under the less trusted academic category. Academics only being trusted by two respondents is also interesting, as it may be a contributing factor to why evidence/science behind policy is not trusted. Studies and academic research are usually what policy is based on and if academic research is untrusted, then this is another barrier that will likely prevent effective communication from occurring.

Data across the top three media source themes has been analysed, with 'locals' being excluded as this theme did not usually point towards specific sources. Specific sources are mentioned multiple times by participants, as shown in Figure 21. This indicates that these media sources have a particular influence on the rural community. Federated Farmers was the most common trusted source, being mentioned nine times across the data sets. This illustrates the importance of Federated Farmers as one of the main trusted communication sources for rural communities in the Tai Tokerau region. Rural papers such as Farmers Weekly and the Rural News, as well as rural/farming newspapers more generally, were also considered by many participants as trustworthy. The combined influence of Farmers Weekly and Rural News was greater than the number of participants who mentioned Federated Farmers, which indicates how influential rural media is to rural communities.

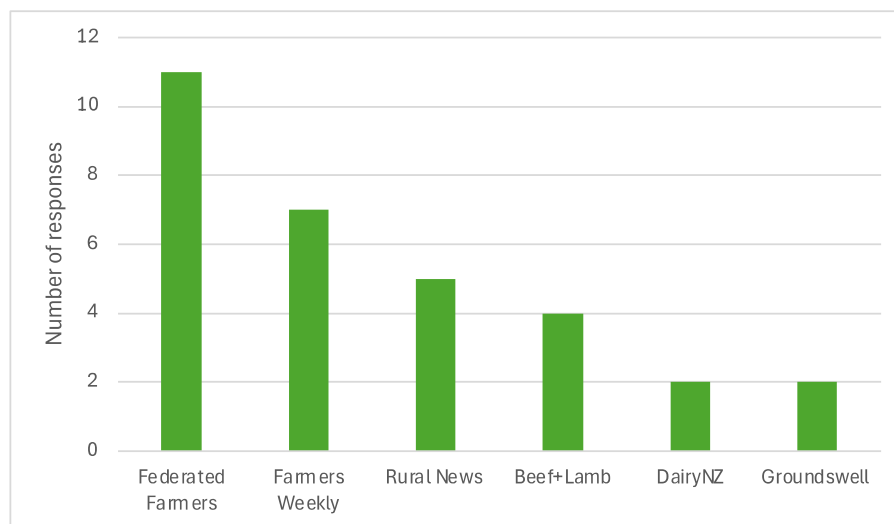


Figure 21: Named trusted media sources

Trusted sources can also be analysed taking into consideration that most participants 'did not' agree with environmental policy and planning reform under the last Labour government. Messaging in the Farmers Weekly and Rural News were assessed. Evaluation of issues from July 2023 to present

indicated that these rural media channels are largely publishing content against environmental policy and planning. Many published articles commented on the negative impacts to rural communities caused by environmental reform from 2017-2023. Headlines such as “regs cost a lot and do little: report” are a common occurrence in the rural media analysed (Wallace, 2023, p.17). Over the election campaign advertisement period from the 14 July 2023 to 13 October 2023, many National Party and Act Party advertisements were published in Rural News, along with messaging around stopping the war on farming. Over this period, Act had three advertisements, including one full page advertisement as in Figure 22 (Rural News, 2023). National advertised three times in the Rural News, as in Figure 22 which shows what was published on the front cover of an issue. These advertisements reinforce the negative view of environmental reform. No other political parties were advertised over the election campaign period.

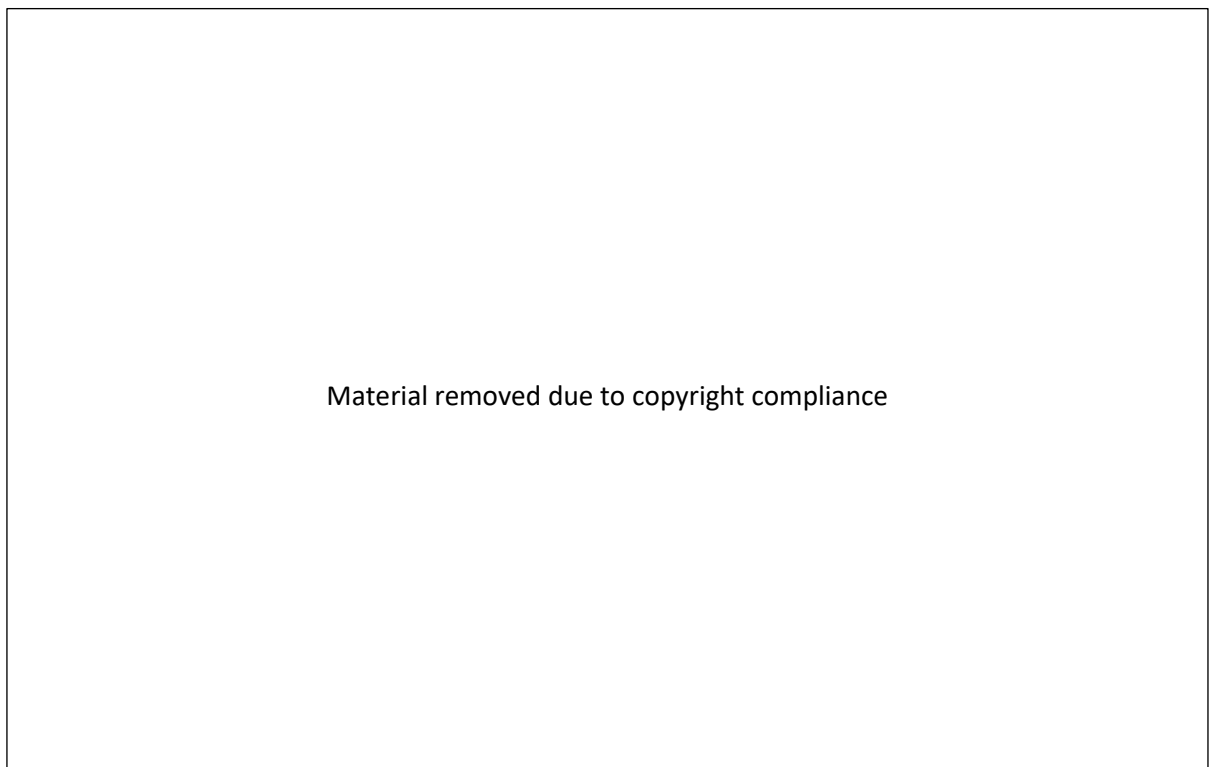


Figure 22: Rural News political party advertisements (Rural News, 26 September 2023, p1 & p4)

The responses to trusted media show a variation between participants when you consider their involvement in the rural industry. Industry representatives, such as those that work in farm consultancy, politics and for rural organisations, tend to trust different sources than the general public. This group tended to trust more direct forms of media such as policy documents and the local community. Industry representatives also tend to trust a wider range of media sources, rather than one or two channels. In comparison, the general public often relied on limited sources and often did not consider direct forms of media as a trusted source for updates on rural issues.

The use of social media as a source of information is increasing and will likely continue to be used in future years (Westerman et al., 2014). Many interviewees spoke to the rise in popularity of social media, with online platforms being considered both trustworthy and non-trustworthy. Lack of fact checking on social media was also commented on by a few interview participants and in-person survey respondents. Concerns around the credibility of social media sources is also raised by many academics (Westerman et al., 2014; Muhammed & Mathew, 2022; Aimeur et al., 2023). Despite this an interview participant spoke to how online media is becoming more popular than traditional media:

“I spend more time on TikTok and Facebook reels than I do reading the newspaper, so social media is pretty powerful.”
- Participant 9

It is notable that the previous quote is from a middle-aged interview participant, showing the influence online media likely has across multiple age groups. This quote also shows the power that social media channels and short form video content will likely have going forward. Snippets of information communicated through short videos has been increasing dramatically with TikTok being one of the most common sources of information, especially among younger audiences (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022). Social media communication through videos is also raised by the aforementioned quote, this style of communication allows for more in depth explanations to occur. Communication using social media also allows for two way communication, as the audience can engage with those sending the messages. In comparison, newspapers such as the Farmers Weekly, have less two-way communication opportunities, as feedback is largely given through letters to the editor or comments on online articles that appear to be largely unmonitored. Social media and its ability to provide spaces for two-way communication between senders and receivers (Fig 14) will likely play an increased role in communication to rural communities in the future.

Overall, trusted media plays a significant role with how policy and planning documents are received by rural communities. The role of rural media is significant and should not be overlooked; rural representatives are also very influential in this space. Differentiations in communication channel preferences between those who work on the land, in comparison to those who are adjunctly involved in the sector, needs to be taken into account when communicating to rural areas. Social media also needs to be considered going forward, particularly the use of online platforms to communicate in short video form.

5.8 Why are these media sources trusted?

Two main themes can be identified around why individuals trust media on issues and updates relating to the rural community. The first theme, was the credibility of the source, with credibility factors varying. The second theme was trusting the source because the media is rural-centric and provides targeted rural news. Responses to why the source is trusted between the two themes or due to a combination of both themes are in Figure 23. Credibility is the main consideration for why a source is trusted, as shown by 62% of responses considering this as the reason to trust a source. Of the responses, 32% considered a rural focus to be the main reason to trust a source. Both credibility and a rural focus together was referenced to create trust in a source by 7% of the responses. Many considered credibility to be linked to science; this is interesting, considering most respondents do not trust the science/evidence behind policy and policy documents. Perhaps a lack of credibility in planning or policy process, communication channel, language and science quote means that policy and policy documents are not considered credible by many participants. A perceived lack of rural focus in policy and policy may also contribute toward this distrust.

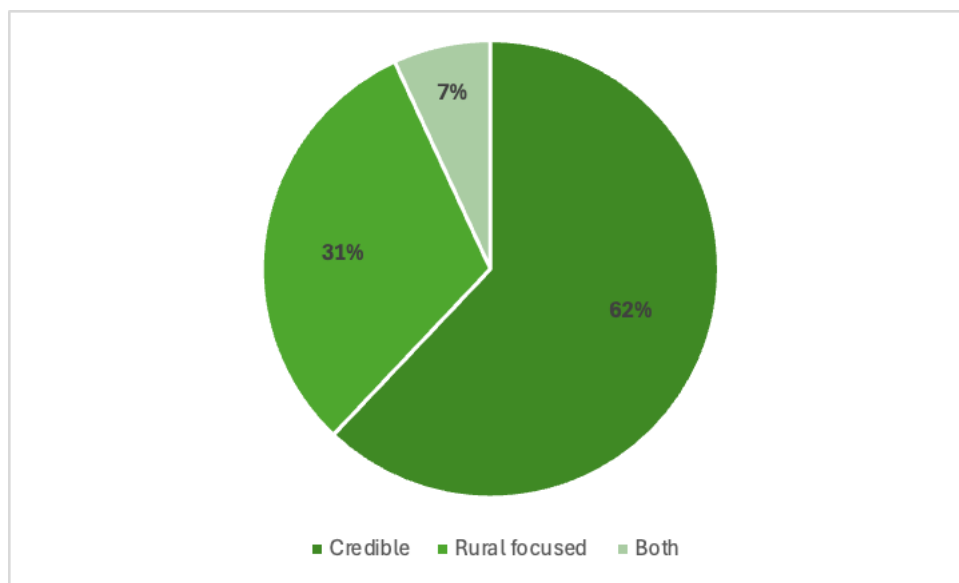


Figure 23: Reasons for trusting media sources

The table below shows summarised responses across these themes from all data sets, with full responses in Appendix E. Alternative responses to why sources are trusted, outside of the identified themes, mostly focused on individuals who only trusted themselves. It is also interesting, that many responses refer to rural as 'farmers', when this is only a segment of the rural community. This demographic appears to be more considered than other elements of the rural community, such as non-farming tangata whenua, lifestyle block owners and remote workers. Perhaps this is a data bias of mostly farmers or those that work closely with farmers being the data sample, or maybe it is reflective of many considering farming as the central aspect of rurality.

Table 2: Influences to trust in a source

Theme	Responses across data sets
Rural centric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting farmers • Farm based • Representing farmers • Genuine farmers interests • Focus on rural communities • Affects rural people • Relevant news articles and sharing of information to rural community • Farming focused • Living off the land • Represents my interests and livelihood • Led by my peers who are living the issues
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible scientific based approach • Because they tell the truth • Factual • No hidden agenda • Good, honest people • True and reliable • Scientific-based approach • Truthful • Less biased against farming • Harder to influence • Firsthand information • Less bias • From the horse's mouth • Balanced • Factual
Other responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't have time to go through all the information that's out there • Using my own judgement based on information from many and varied sources • Have a working relationship with them • Myself and what I see – no trust in anybody • No one source gives the full picture. They all present a view that promotes their own agenda • No other sources to trust

Of the farm discussion group respondents, 50% (2/4) of participants considered farm discussion groups to be a trustworthy source of information¹². This suggests, that they themselves, alongside other peers that make up the rural discussion group in the area, are who this data set considers as the most trustworthy. Firsthand information and that the farm discussion group is living the rural issues are among the reasons why this source is considered trustworthy. Trust in their own people, who are part of the rural community, is the main reason participants trust a communication source across surveys, interviews and document analysis. This requirement of trusting the source was also reflected by interviewees, with one participant stating the following in regard to social media:

*“If I respected the person who made the post,
then I would respect their information.”*
- Participant 1

This indicates that both online and traditional forms of media are subject to the same trustworthy criteria. It also suggests that those who are communicating policy and planning documents need to be respected by the rural community, in order for people to trust the content that they are communicating. Interview participants also raised concerns about the credibility of sources and how misinformation can easily occur on online sources, particularly with social media.

5.9 Other influences to trust of media

How science, te reo and politics influence trust in the media consumed can be compared with how the same factors influence trust in policy. The answers to trust in media vary significantly to the responses to the trust in policy questions. This suggests that policy and media are held to different trust standards. The associations between policy and politics perhaps results in policy being critiqued to a higher standard.

5.9.1 The influence of evidence/science on trust in media

The evidence and science quoted by the source were considered to be somewhat influential to trust. This question was not asked directly to interview participants as evidence and science were talked about more broadly. Thus, interview data is not included in the results. Figure 24 illustrates that 54% of responses stated that evidence/science influences trust, in comparison with 36% stating that it is of no influence. This is interesting, considering many participants noted that “facts” or “truth”, was why they trusted a source. Bringing to question whether evidence/science are not considered factual, true or truthful by the Northland rural community.

¹² The farm discussion group is referred to as ‘other’ in the graphs.

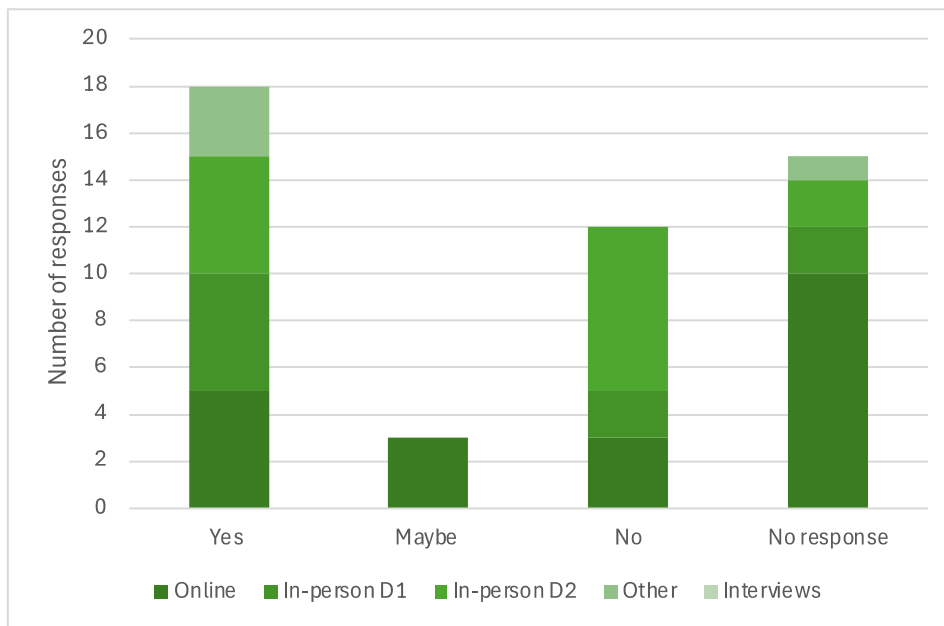


Figure 24: The influence of evidence and science to trust in policy

This was elaborated on further, with participants asked which sources were considered trusted for science and evidence. Some responded the same sources as who they would trust for news/updates on rural issues. This is interesting, given that many of the sources listed are not science-related but instead are the agriculture industry or media/news outlets. Outside of this, the main themes were independent experts, agricultural science organisations, universities/academics or no-one. The responses were varied with a wide range of sources listed. AgResearch was the most common trusted source of science and this agricultural science organisation was mentioned three times. AgKnowledge or scientists associated with this organisation were referred to twice and Lincoln University or individual scientists associated with the university were also mentioned twice.

Other responses included comments such as “proper science” or “not many” and “not sure” that reaffirm a general scepticism towards science and scientists. The issue of science being manipulated to suit a particular idea was also raised by interview participants. Multiple interview participants raised the importance of credible sources and looking into the individual or organisation’s background to determine research credibility. One online survey participant also questioned how science can be manipulated to justify views, as shown in the following quote:

*“Very hard to say. Science is like the bible.
You can always find a quote or a statistic
to back your theory.”*
- Anon online survey participant

The question encouraged people to list the sources. Thus multiple responses were encouraged, so the data does not reflect accurate percentages but rather indicates trusted sources of science/evidence. The number of responses across the main themes is shown in Figure 25.

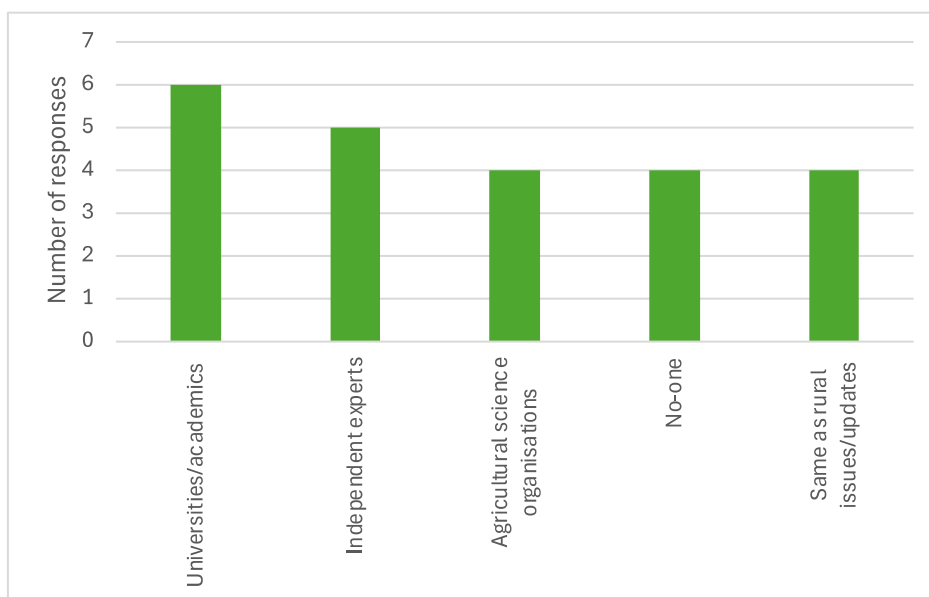


Figure 25: Trusted sources of science themes

Overall, universities/academics were the most trusted theme, followed by independent experts, as in Figure 25. Two of the three named independent experts did not come up with any notable profiles when searched on Google, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram or LinkedIn. This may be due to misspelling or due to the independent experts not having a significant online presence. The other three science themes were trusted equally. Universities/academics being trusted by six people in regard to science is interesting, considering academics were only trusted by two respondents as a source for rural issues/updates. This indicates that sources for science and sources for rural issues/updates are held to differing standards. The responses to this mainly refer to science as opposed to social science; this brings to question what is considered to be science and if social sciences are considered science. Or if more traditional sciences, such as soil science or agricultural science, are favoured. Full responses across the main themes can be found in Appendix F.

5.9.2 The influence of te reo on trust in media

Most participants do not consider te reo use in media to influence trust, with 80% (28/35) of respondents answering 'no' on the survey and seven respondents (20%) considering that te reo does influence their trust in media, as in Figure 26. Interview participants are not included in this graph as te reo was spoken to more broadly in a policy sense for interviews rather than differentiating between

policy and media. Fewer people were concerned about te reo in media, than te reo use in policy as discussed in section 5.5.5.

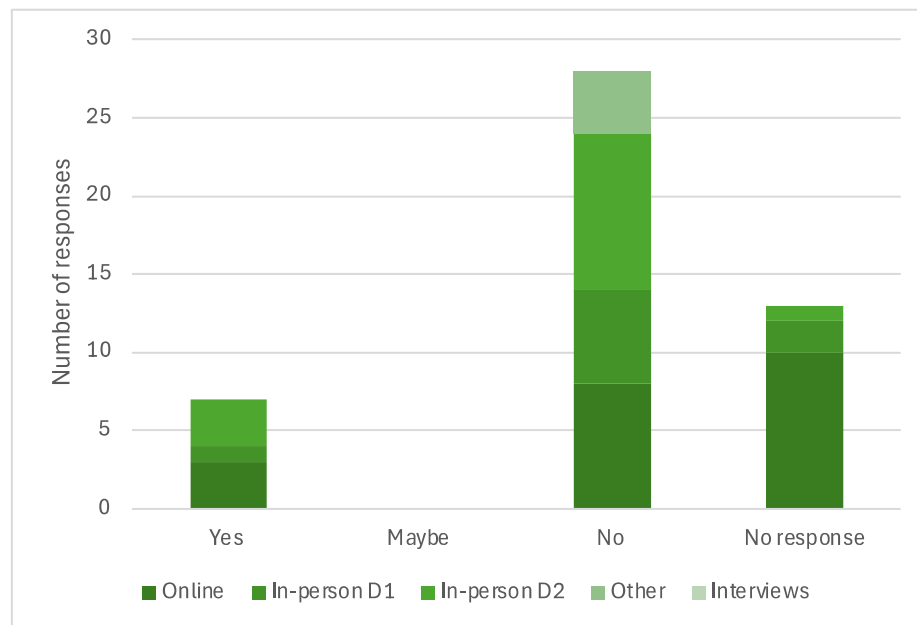


Figure 26: The influence of te reo on trust in media

When probed further, most considered te reo negatively influenced trust due to a lack of understanding or fluency. This way of influencing trust is similar to how te reo influences trust of policy, as in section 5.5.5. The following interview quote, encapsulates how many across the data sets view te reo due to a lack of bilingualism:

“Added cognitive load for non-native te reo speakers”
- Participant 3

However, one in-person survey participant went as far as to state that there is “no need for te reo.” The comment reflects a minority view of those that do not consider te reo to have a place in communication in ANZ. The minority that considers this to be the case are often the same respondents who distrust te reo due to Māori having a say in decision-making, as mentioned in section 5.5.5.

5.9.3 Politics

Most participants across all data sets agree that communications associated with politics are untrustworthy, with 65% not considering this style of communication trustworthy, as in Figure 27 (shown as ‘no’). Only five respondents considered political communications to be a credible source.

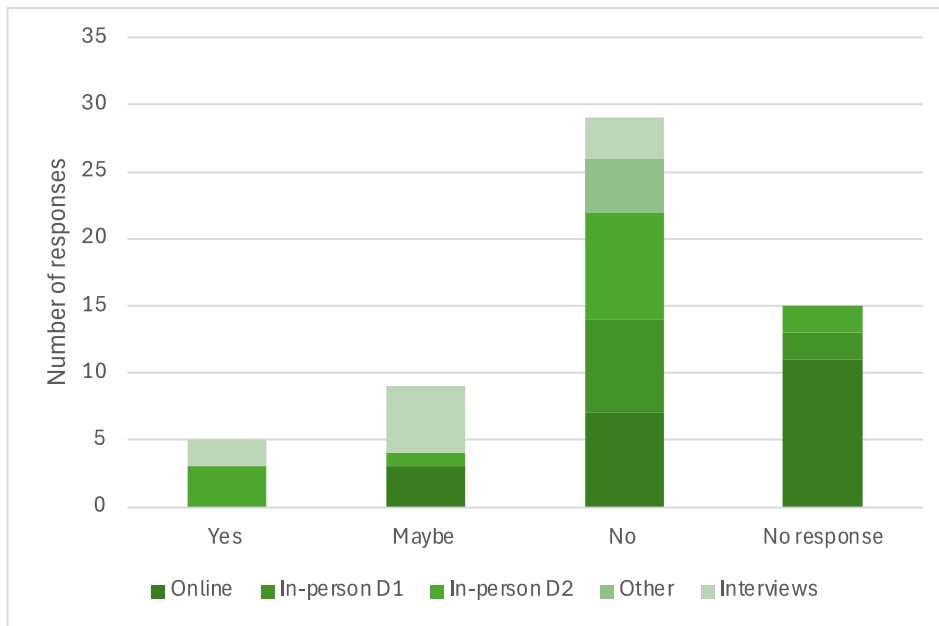


Figure 27: Distrust in communication associated with political parties

There was variation between survey data and interview data, with most interview participants considering political communication to be trustworthy for understanding ideas regarding policy. With the connection between politics and policy being acknowledged by many interviewees and thus this style of communication was considered by many within this data set as a useful source. However, it was noted by many that political sources will have a bias towards the ideology of the associated party.

The distrust in politics is interesting, considering Federated Farmers is a very political organisation that lobbies extensively for farmers. Political affiliations of this organisation are also significant, with the previous Federated Farmers president from 2020-2023, Andrew Hoggard becoming an Act list MP following his presidency (Act New Zealand, n.d.). This inconsistency will be expanded on further in the Discussion Chapter.

5.10 How to improve communication?

Out of the 58 participants, only 34 participants responded to this question. Ideas to improve communications can be grouped into the following themes: grassroots, clear communication, face-to-face engagement, context, partnerships and repairing trust. Participants were encouraged to give a short answer response, so many respondents suggested approaches that incorporated multiple themes. Figure 28 illustrates the number of responses recorded across the themes and shows which ideas were most commonly stated by participants. In many cases, multiple answers were recorded from each participant, thus percentages cannot be drawn from this data. Instead, Figure 28 provides an indication for some of the common themes across the data.

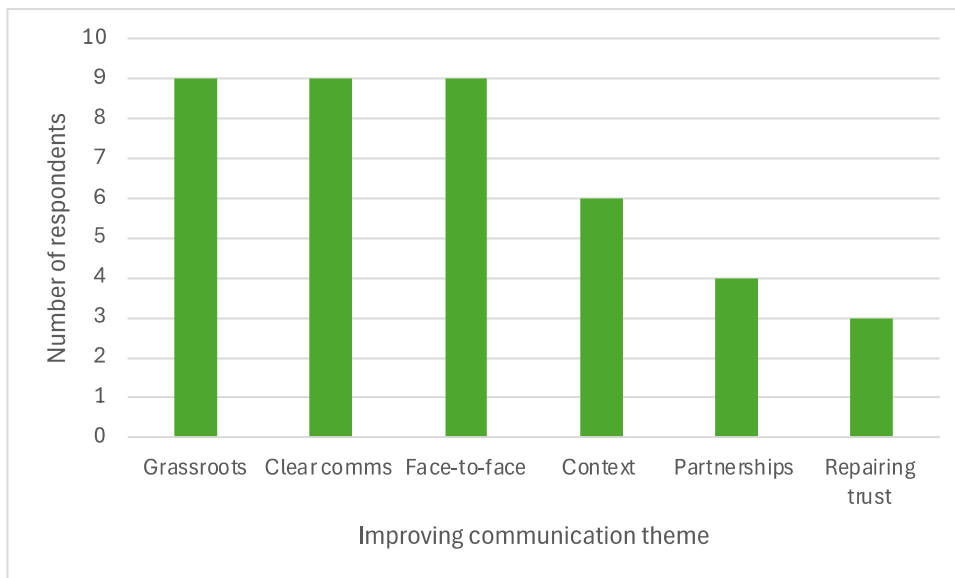


Figure 28: Themes for how to improve communication to rural communities

Many commented that it was easy to critique the issues with communication to rural communities, however, it is more tricky to come up with ideas on how to resolve these. Many spoken to across the data collection methods voiced that the rural communities do not feel heard. Multiple participants also emphasised the importance of the rural community being part of future environmental changes and reform. This is encapsulated by the following interview participant quote:

“Take the rural community [along] with these changes.”
- Participant 9

The lack of bringing the rural community along with past policy reform was also critiqued as an issue by those who disagreed with the policy changes from 2017-23. Many critiqued aspects of the policies to have been impractical; perhaps if the rural community had been more involved in the policy development, more practical solutions may have occurred. Bringing communities along with any changes was referenced by many interview participants. These findings suggest that improving communication will assist in ensuring rural communities feel heard and will help to bring the rural community along with any future changes.

The answers across these themes are in Table 3. Interviewee answers have been significantly amended for conciseness. Responses from surveys have also been amended for readability and significant grammatical or spelling errors have been removed.

Table 3: Responses across themes of how to improve communication

Theme	Responses across data sets
Grassroots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consultation at grass roots level • By individual communication • Communicate from the lowest level upwards • Well they could start with talking to farmers... • Get out and communicate with everyday farmers • Talk to actual farmers • People talking and listening to farmers • Grass roots networks • Work with local farmers at grassroots level
Clear communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and concise messaging • Develop videos explaining rationale for the policy • Shorter and clearer • Simplicity • Communication should be done well and as accurate as possible • Plain English and succinct – accessible, short versions • Short videos, explain it well, sell it to people • Plain language • Make sure comms are not conflicting, storytelling (DairyNZ has done well)
Face-to-face engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People talking in person or over the phone • Open and honest korero, you know, like this • Being a seen face. Rural communities require people to get out and be seen but not just noisy rate payers but everyone • Talk to rural community leaders • Hold seminars • Must talk to people on the ground, Groundswell was successful because they had people on ground talking to people, coffee table discussions • Bringing it out there, just be involved • Sitting down with groups and explaining • Farming papers, sit down with the editors
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the context of people • Work to understand how tangata whenua see environmental impacts. Particularly important in northland • Also, those that are hard to reach • The rural community financially is not in a good space, it is going to have to be implemented at the right time • Considering Northland Regional Council is a Council in crisis • Explain why te reo Māori is being used... we've got the Treaty... • More discussion with groups involved before policy stage
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-design, learn from rural communities – they're tough and resilient • Work with industry leaders and work with them on how to do the research • Working with rural communities to share what each knows • The Councils are working with them rather than imposing cost
Repairing trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship building • Need to build trust on both sides • Needs to be in good faith from both sides • Respect each other

The main themes identified are grassroots communication and clear communication. Those communicating policy and planning should get out into rural communities and talk to individuals and groups directly. This communication was encouraged to be simple and concise, as well as accurate and not conflicting. The importance of these conversations being ongoing was also highlighted by many. An interview participant warned of the risks of planners, government and councils not building a connection with the rural community. They referred to people who come and go from rural communities without creating and maintaining connections as 'tourists'. This concern around those providing messages on policy and planning coming and going from communities was also voiced by many in informal conversations during in-person survey data collection:

*"Otherwise, you are just a tourist
turning up with a message and
then you disappear again."*

- Participant 2

The above quote, alongside many other comments, advocate for face-to-face communication as the preferred channel. This ties in with the aforementioned media richness theory as face-to-face is the richest communication channel. A variety of face-to-face meeting places were suggested such as sheds, sale yards, on farms, at marae and over a coffee table. These meeting locations are all places where rural communities frequent and require communicators to go out into the rural community, rather than expecting the rural community to come to planners and the wider environmental industry. Interview participants also raised that these conversations would not be easy and that open listening to all voices even if you do not agree with them will be important in order to move forward. The importance of listening to everyone and respecting views was illustrated by the following quote:

*"Have the hard conversations,
and become more human."*

- Participant 7

Context was referenced by six participants, five of these were interview participants. The importance of being aware of the context that policy and communication is situated within was emphasised. Context was considered in many ways, including speaking with all groups involved, understanding the role of tangata whenua in policy and planning, as well as being aware of the economic hardship currently faced by dry stock farmers. It also includes being aware of the rural context and understanding that not all areas are easily accessible and these hard to reach communities also need to be part of conversations.

Partnerships were also raised as a way to improve communication. This was considered to be working with rural communities and collaborating with them to share knowledge. It was also considered that if rural communities were involved in the early stages of policy creation, that this would increase trust

and respect for the planning/policy industry as well as for the process. Alongside this, many also noted that partnerships could result in more practical and cost-effective solutions. Partnering with communities was also considered important as each rural community is unique and partnerships at a more localised scale would enable a communities uniqueness to be reflected in policy and planning decisions.

The final theme was repairing trust, which was noted in multiple ways including, mutual trust, respect and honesty. Participants reflected their concerns around trust being fundamental to effective communication, with 86% of respondents considering trust to be a barrier to effective communication, as discussed in section 5.3. Ideas on how to repair this trust included informal meetings and active listening to rural communities as opposed to one-way communication from planners. This ties back to the media richness theory that considers open two-way, in-person communication to be the richest form of communication (Lengel & Daft, 1988).

Other answers are in Table 4, these have also been amended for conciseness and readability. These responses include specific actions as well as more general actions to improve communication.

Table 4: Other responses to how to improve communication

Response type	Responses recorded across data sets
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using multiple channels • Long term thinking – 50-year strategies not 3-year election cycles • Communication in a way that isn't ramming it down rural community throats, take the rural community with you • Their behaviour should be impeccable. Because they're representing your Regional Council, which is highly visible. And you know, people love to pick fault with local government. So your behaviour has to be on par and it has to be perfect • More honest people • Don't know • Be more realistic • Less Māori influence • By the communities themselves and the people it effects • No idea • Keep it on TV, keep newspapers going • Use English language communications • Instead of brainwashing the public that farmers are ruining the planet blah blah blah. We are literally demonised by the council. They treat us like cash cows for rates. There is no communication it's just full dictatorship • Keeping people up to date of where policy is at and what this means i.e.. the Freshwater policy is on hold until date, but freshwater farm plans will still be coming into effect from ... date • MPI on farm support teams. Huge money invested in their salaries and they need to be working harder • Open discussion and groups not pushing their own agenda

The main sub-theme under other responses was being unsure on how to improve communication. This accounted for three responses. Many of the responses in 'other' category also refer to the behaviour of communicators and disliking communication styles. Participants also consider communication should be open and honest and critique communicators' behaviour, such as: "*ramming it down rural community throats*," "*brainwashing*," and "*pushing their own agenda*". Two survey responses out of 34 focus on either English communication or less Māori influence, this shows a small minority of individuals that consider less te reo and te ao Māori to be the solution to improved communication. Some participants also referenced suggestions that fall outside of communication, such as long-term planning and Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) on farm support teams.

5.11 Summary

This chapter illustrates that trust is a fundamental barrier to effectively communicating policy and planning documents to Northland's rural community. Influences of trust can be considered across two mediums: distrust in policy and distrust in media sources. Distrust in policy data indicated that distrust in policy is greater than distrust in media. Policy trust is influenced by political ideology, distrust in the environmental/planning industry, misinformation, jargon, scepticism of evidence/science as well as the lack of understanding and/or dislike of te reo Māori use. Trust in media has similar themes, with politics, evidence/science, te reo and education all being potential influences to trust. Rural-centric and credible sources are considered most trustworthy.

Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the results from Chapter 5 and connects these findings to the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Key themes across the research and the implications these themes have on the research questions and sub-objectives are explored. The following themes are discussed: perceptions around environmental policy and planning, understanding of policy and planning, trusted and distrusted media and finally communication barriers. Lastly, how to improve communication, trust and relationship building within rural communities will be discussed. Ideas mentioned throughout this chapter are developed into tangible solutions that aim to enhance communication of policy and planning to rural communities, as found in the recommendations section of Chapter 7.

6.2 Perceptions around environmental policy and planning

The rural community appeared to negatively perceive environmental policy and planning. Most participants disagree with the reform under the last Labour government from 2017 to 2023. This indicates that reporting from political organisations such as Federated Farmers and Groundswell, as well as, the media on dissatisfaction in rural communities, were accurate. However, it is interesting to note that many participants agreed with the intent of the reform. This desire to have better environmental outcomes is a commonly agreed upon intent. How to implement the aspiration of improving the environment in practice through policy and planning regulation is contentious and ideas on how to improve this are not unanimous. Without changes to policy, the intent to have better outcomes will not result in better outcomes. This indicates a disconnect between the intent to improve and the willingness to change rural practices.

All interviewees referred to rural communities in ANZ more broadly. This may indicate a shared assumption of a common cultural set of experiences and views are experienced by rural communities more broadly, as mentioned in Chapter 3. It may also suggest that there is a perceived cultural connection between rural communities. This perception is founded on assumptions that may or may not be truthful due to the diversity in rurality across Aotearoa. The potential 'shared' rural experience and how this has been idealised was touched on by research into Country Calendar (Fountaine, 2019). Similarities can be found between Fountaine (2019) and this research, as interviewees referred to rural communities across ANZ, as opposed to only discussing the case study of Northland, which may suggest a 'shared' rural experience.

Another influential perception towards environmental policy and planning is distrust in politics. Political parties are generally untrusted, perhaps planners should consider creating a greater distance between policy and politics when communicating. However, in practice, policy is inherently attached to political parties who advocate for issues or policies aligned with their ideology. Perhaps strategies for creating a perceived separation between politics and policy could be explored.

This distrust in politics is interesting, considering Federated Farmers are the most trusted single source of information, despite the organisation being inherently political. Studies have considered Federated Farmers as politically impactful lobbyists that have significantly influenced ANZ policy (Hall, 2021; Vincent, 2001). From 1941 until present time, Federated Farmers have advocated for farmers and rural issues through political lobbying (Vincent, 2001). Federated Farmers have policy analysts who look over policy through the business of farming lens and then give feedback based on farmers' best interests (Vincent, 2001). Advocacy is provided around local and central government policies created under the RMA as well as more general political issues (Vincent, 2001). Perhaps it is the perceived disconnect between politicians and the rural community that makes people consider politicians are out of touch with rural communities. Comments made by participants indicate that they consider groups that are disconnected from rural communities, such as politicians and academics to be untrustworthy. It is also possible that Federated Farmers represents ideology held by many in the rural community. In contrast, political parties are a voice for all ANZ voters rather than just rural people.

6.2.1 Understanding of policy and planning

There appears to be limited understanding of policy and planning, with many interviewees and in-person survey participants commenting on this. This identified knowledge gap illustrates that there is likely ineffective engagement with rural communities from planners, councils and central government. Lack of understanding is a significant barrier to effective communication and when applying communication theory, can be considered as noise. Strategies should be implemented to increase awareness in rural communities. This may reduce misinformation and misunderstanding within this community. An informed public may result in rural members such as Matt King and Farmer James, who advocate for science that differs from general scientific consensus, (eg: King, 2024; James, 2022) having less influence.

Participants mentioned a variety of factors that were said to influence the lack of understanding of policy; these included complex language or jargon as well as document length. These comments are aligned with communication theory that argues against using complex jargon when engaging with the public (Bullock et al., 2019). Some suggestions from participants on how to improve understanding included creating short videos, one-page information sheets, in-person conversations, hui, and through on-farm advisors. However, these suggestions are aligned with some of the existing

communication strategies already in place, such as the strategies used by NRC in the “wai it matters” engagement process. (Northland Regional Council, 2024c). This brings to question, whether these strategies are being impaired by ideological differences that prevent the audience from understanding concepts being conveyed. If this were the case, then it would be the values or ideology that is the noise preventing understanding of policy and planning instead of complex language, or lack of creative communication channels.

6.3 Communication barriers

The main communication barrier identified is a lack of trust; this is influenced by multiple interconnected factors. These factors, also referred to as noise under communication theory, include; science, te reo use, politics, distrust in planning and the wider environmental industry and education. Alongside the identified aspects that influence trust, there may be many others; the research questions focused on these areas and thus the results reflect this focus. Relationship building with rural communities should be prioritised alongside segmentation to improve trust and communication.

6.3.1 Science

There is also a disconnect between many stating they trust the science, but disagreeing with the reforms despite them being backed by science. This brings to question, if science is only trusted if it is not negatively impacting rural communities’ way of life and economic viability. Individuals choosing to hear what they believe rather than information they do not believe, regardless of credible reasoning, is referred to as belief bias (Klauer, et al., 2000). In the context of this situation, it indicates that the rural community are more likely to trust evidence that agrees with their pre-existing views and less likely to agree with science/evidence that contradicts their beliefs. The data shows that credibility is a primary factor contributing to trust in a source, with ‘science-based’ and ‘factual’ being quoted as aspects of credibility. This credibility consideration is inconsistent with the distrust in science, reaffirming that trust is likely influenced by belief bias as opposed to rational logic. When considering trusted sources for science, academics and universities were considered to be the most trusted source. This is inconsistent when considering policy and planning references science or evidence that comes from academics and universities.

6.3.2 Te reo

Te reo use was also considered as noise by many participants across survey data collection methods, as well as submissions analysed on the NRC freshwater plan change. There is a notable variation between survey respondents when compared to interview participants. Only 20% (2/10) of interview respondents, consider te reo to influence trust whereas, 45% (18/40) of survey respondents consider te reo to influence trust. Both of the interview participants considered te reo to be a positive influence

on trust. Many survey participants are very concerned with te reo use and some with te ao Māori more broadly. This brings to question how these views, such as an in-person survey suggestion, to improve communications by removing ‘Māori influence’ fit within Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi obligations. It is unlikely those answering the survey were considering obligations to protect Māori culture and participation in Part 2 sections 6e, 7a, 8 of the RMA. However, despite obligations to protect Māori culture, a lack of fluency in te reo Māori can be considered noise, if not effectively communicated. Arguably te reo is one of our national languages and is a fundamental component to the fabric of our culture in ANZ. Although, if this is not communicated effectively it can lead to confusion.

Distrust in te reo also perhaps indicates ineffective education around Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the ongoing implications this has on policy. Arguably an example of lack of education on Te Tiriti is the current Treaty Principles Bill that seeks to define principles for the Treaty. This Bill redefines the principles outside of what the courts have already defined in case law. David Seymour in a press release on the 11th of September stated that the Bill is “*a set of principles to justify actions that many New Zealanders view as contrary to the principle of equal rights, including co-governance in the delivery of public services and even ethnic quotas within public institutions*” (Seymour, 2024). These concerns around Māori being afforded different rights are also reflected by a minority of survey participants.

6.3.3 Politics

Connections with global political ideology can be found in both the views of participants and the views found in the Rural News with depictions such as the one in Figure 29 (Evans, 2023). This caricature indicates a distrust of wokeness, a term that many in the rural community consider planning to fall under. The cartoon also perhaps reflects the aforementioned views of consultants being academics or ‘tourists’ who are not in touch with rural communities. It also comments on wider political issues around gender that shows the interconnected nature planning and policy has with global politics.

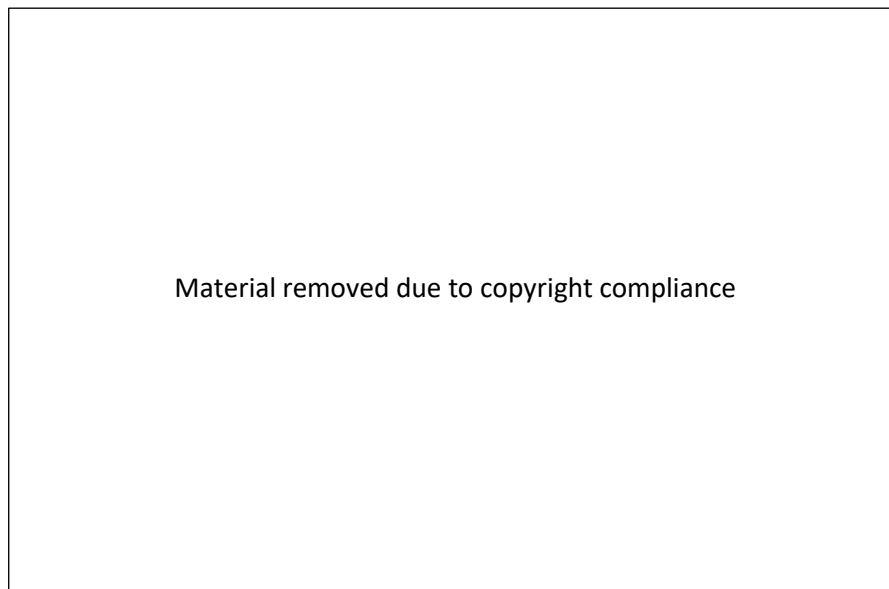


Figure 29: Connections between environmental policy and wider political rhetoric (Evans, 2023)

There are also links between this type of anti-wokeness in ANZ political rhetoric with an international trend towards populism. International political rhetoric was also present at Groundswell protests, with attendees sporting 'MAGA – Make Ardern Go Away' in red as signage, posters and hats (Daalder, 2019; Voorend, 2021). This can be directly linked to the 'Make America Great Again' political slogan coined by Trump (Daalder, 2019; Voorend, 2021). A recent Curia Market Research poll found that 40% of rural Aotearoa would vote for Donald Trump (Dahm, 2024). In comparison, the Curia Market Research poll found that 23% of voters in cities and 21% of voters in towns would vote for Trump (Dahm, 2024). This indicates a significant ideological and political difference between rural and urban. The MAGA rhetoric being used by some attendees at Groundswell protests may be reflective of this pro-Trump group. In addition, research into Canterbury farming communities indicates a connection between alt-right, Covid-19 conspiracies and fringe Groundswell attendees (Brown, 2023). This illustrates the interconnected nature of policy and planning with wider political rhetoric globally. Anti-woke ideology also likely contributes as a barrier to effective communication. This brings to question if perhaps it is ideology that is the barrier to effective communication to rural communities as opposed to distrust caused by science, te reo and industry reputation.

6.3.4 Planning and the wider environmental industry

A further example of noise or a communication barrier is environmental industry distrust. This can be related to Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation theory, referred to in Chapter 3.8 that illustrates the importance of public engagement not being tokenistic. Some participants consider that the consultation with rural communities is tokenistic. When applying Arnstein's theory tokenistic communication would be informing, consultation and placation (Arnstein, 1969). These styles of communication around informing and consulting are commonly used by Councils and Governments, for example, with NRC's 'wai it matters' campaign. The comments made across data collection indicate

that a negative industry reputation is likely creating a barrier to effective communication with Aotearoa's rural community. Arnstein considers successful participation to be partnerships, delegated power and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). Partnership based approaches with rural communities have proven successful in improving environmental outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 3.8. Successful partnerships include QEII and the Living Water Partnership, both projects were started by rural communities themselves (National Trust, 2024; Living Waters, n.d.). Perhaps there is the opportunity for the policy and planning industry to explore wider-scale partnerships with rural communities, that enable high levels of citizen power when applied to Arnstein's ladder of participation. However, it is interesting to note that co-governance, which is a partnership approach with Māori to environmental planning, is disliked by some in the rural community, specifically farmers spoken to in the in-person survey. Perhaps partnerships are only well received by these farmers when they are the ones benefiting from increased participation due to the policy.

It is also interesting to note that a lot of the targeted advertisement pop-ups I get when looking at anti-planning webpages or news articles are from National and Act MP's. There has also been a noticeable increase in right wing targeted advertising on my social media since I have been researching this dissertation. This perhaps indicates a connection in internet algorithms between distrust in policy and planning, rural communities and right-wing content. Algorithms usually connect individuals with media or advertisements that they think they will be interested in. Individuals being shown relevant or like content is referred to as an echo chamber and has been linked to the rise in misinformation due to individuals only viewing like-minded content (Del Vicario et al., 2015). Perhaps echo-chambers also have a part to play in influencing the views and lack of trust the rural community has towards the planning and environmental industry.

6.3.5 Education as a communication barrier

A further consideration is that survey responses, both online and in-person, were poorly written or spelt incorrectly. The responses recorded in tables in the Results Chapter had to be amended for readability and conciseness. This may suggest a limited level of literacy, that may also be a barrier or noise preventing effective communication. Low literacy levels are likely reflective of Northland having low education levels as in Figure 30 compared to the rest of ANZ (StatsNZ, 2018). Studies have also shown, that rural areas including Tai Tokerau, have high socioeconomic deprivation, as discussed in Chapter 3, which is closely linked to low education achievement (Whitehead et al., 2024).

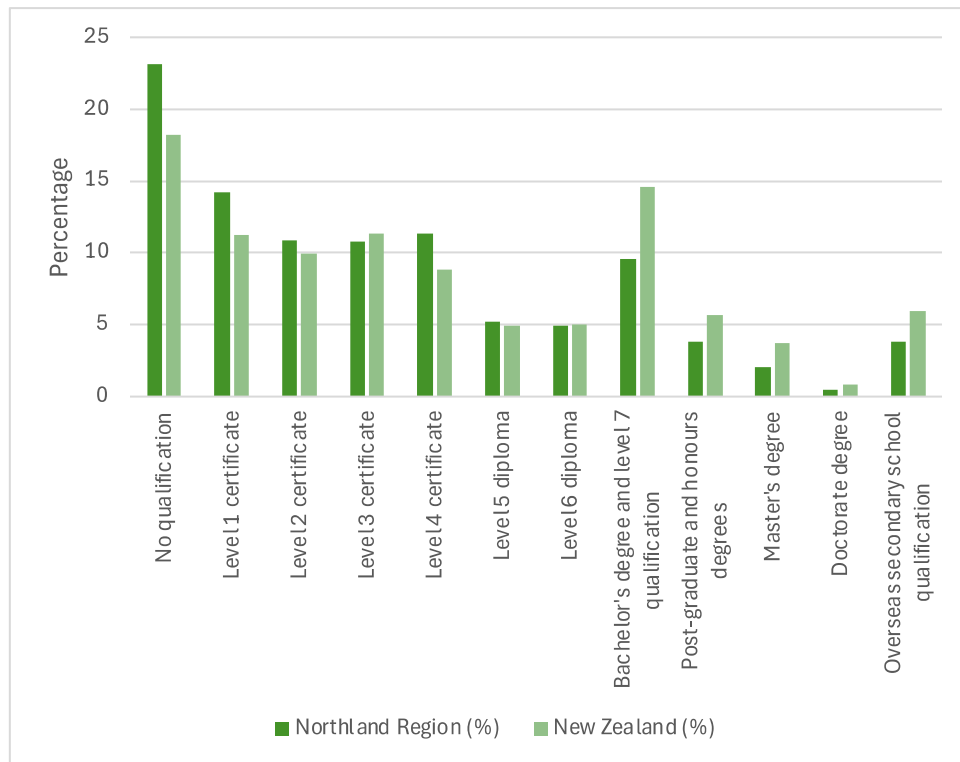


Figure 30: Comparing levels of education between Northland and ANZ (Data from: StatsNZ, 2018)

This is further supported by research from 2023 into inequities in school leavers entering medicine, which found that rural schools in Aotearoa have the lowest rate of achieving university entrance (Mason et al., 2023). The study found rural high schools are ranked the lowest, followed by regional schools and then urban schools (Mason et al., 2023). This suggests that Tai Tokerau rural communities likely has lower levels of education than indicated in Figure 30 due to rural schools having lower achievement rates. Educational barriers in rural communities occur due to a range of factors and should be considered as noise when communicating to rural communities in ANZ.

6.4 Trusted and distrusted media

The identified trusted sources show how a variety of different communication channels are trusted and these channels can be utilised when communicating with rural stakeholders. The communication theory of segmentation that targets each stakeholder through a communication channel that is best suited to them could be utilised to achieve this (Goyat, 2011). A study into segmentation for climate change concluded that the communication tool can potentially reduce divisiveness between segments (Hine et al., 2014). Segmentation could thus be used in this context to improve understanding and perhaps also reduce the perceived 'urban-rural divide' discussed in Chapter 3.4.

The relationships that segments have with each other are also important to note. Rural representatives, rural media and industry are identified as trusted sources for the general rural community, so there is a flow of communication through this stakeholder group (interim receivers in Fig 31) to the rural public (final receivers in Fig 31). This suggests that effective direct communication to these interim sources needs to occur in order for them to be able communicate these messages onwards to the wider rural community. An interview participant suggested talking directly with rural newspaper editors as a possible way to improve communications of environmental policy and planning. Direct dialogue with editors is one potential way that effective communication with interim receivers could occur. Doing this effectively could reduce misinformation, it could also lessen negative perceptions of environmental policy and policy, that are commonly referenced in rural media, as discussed in Chapter 5.7.

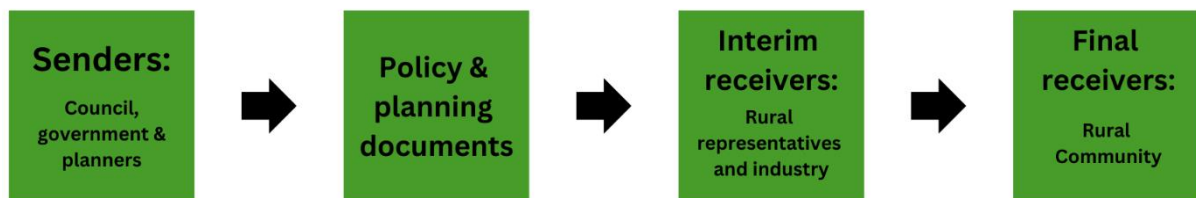


Figure 31: Flow of communication to rural communities

The aforementioned noise factors, such as science, te reo use, and environmental industry distrust can be combatted through the implementation of successful segmentation strategies to communication. Stakeholders in the rural community are diverse and these communities should not be considered as homogenous. To apply segmentation theory to this situation, then communication would need to be tailored to each group (Goyat, 2011). For example – communication could be targeted to each group, as shown in Figure 32. The graphic illustrates some potential segments, many other segments exist and this is an indicative, not exhaustive, example. This should be alongside collective in-person meetings or town hall style events where all segments have a chance to interact with each other. The process would likely illustrate the differences and commonalities between all segments that make up the Tai Tokerau rural community. It highlights the importance of effective two-way communication, in order to repair trust and improve relationships between the environmental industry and rural

communities. The process shows the importance of ongoing communication, that continues to improve based on feedback, as shown by the circular nature of Figure 32.

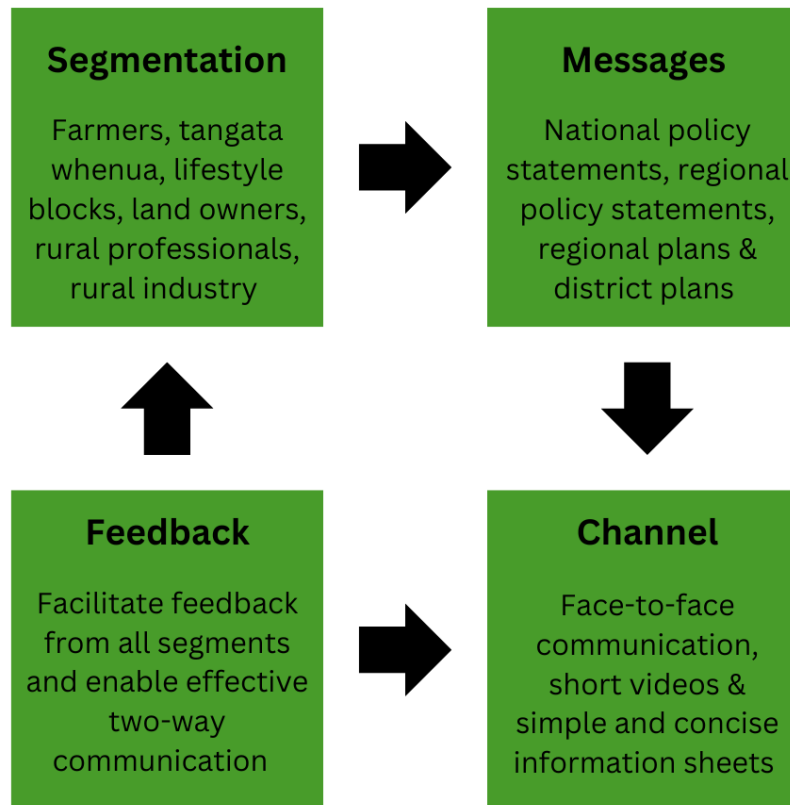


Figure 32: Segmentation of communication to rural communities

A one size fits all approach to communication is unlikely to be successful when communicating to rural communities; creative and inclusive engagement should occur instead. However, diverse communication channels have already been utilised, such as NRC’s ‘wai it matters’ campaign, that included strategies from social media to community hui and A&P Show attendance (Northland Regional Council, 2024c). This indicates that segmentation needs to occur in parallel with relationship building to ensure that those communicating planning and policy are considered to be a credible and factual source. Even if segmentation strategies are deployed they will likely be unsuccessful if those communicating the information are not trusted.

The most trusted communication sources that could be used to communicate to rural communities are Federated Farmers. This brings to question, whether there is a way for planners, local and central

government to improve their relationship and communication with this organisation. This may reduce miscommunication and result in them being able to leverage trusted channels to communicate directly with rural communities. This may assist in overcoming the aforementioned communication barriers and improve communication and trust.

6.5 How to improve communication and trust?

Many commented in the in-person survey that we need more local people who understand the rural community working with local communities. Perhaps, local consultants, with community connections, would be best suited to rural roles, as opposed to out of area consultants. Building on local connections is also central to grassroots communication; the following quote encapsulates this:

*“Being a seen face. Rural communities
require people to get out and be seen”*
– Participant 2

Groundswell was referenced as a success in communication due to its reliance on grassroots conversations. This was also referred in conversation by participants at the in-person survey data collection. The projects referenced in Chapter 3, under the section around working with farmers, also relied on this style of informal grassroots communication. Initiatives such as QEII and Future Whenua also rely on a partnership approach and utilise face-to-face communication (QEII National Trust, 2024; Future Whenua, 2024). Partnerships and face-to-face communication, were both themes identified across the results, as ways to improve communication and trust. Despite the commonalities around grassroots and face-to-face communication, as well as partnerships, it is important that stakeholders are communicated with in a way that works best for each segment of the rural community. This communication can utilise these themes but should be uniquely tailored to each segment, as illustrated in Figure 32.

Landcare research (2023) found that 6 in 10 farmers did not have trust in those creating regulations. As discussed in Chapter 3, this indicates a distrust towards the environmental industry and politics. Both of these causes of distrust have also been reflected in the findings of this research. No mentions were made in the interviews or surveys about an ‘urban-rural divide.’ Instead, participants spoke about a lack of trust and unrealistic or unviable policies. This suggests that the perceived divide discussed in Chapter 3, is far more nuanced than a simple divide between rural communities and urban communities. The data indicates, that there is more of a rural distrust, as opposed to a divide. This finding is similar to research by Massey University (2023), that also disputed the idea of a divide between urban and rural. The research from Massey University, also found that a disconnect between these demographics were not driven by the respective groups, instead, politicians and media likely accentuates this divide (Massey University, 2023). Findings from this case study also support this,

particularly sections 5.7 and 6.3.3 which both illustrate how anti-policy and planning phrases or terminology are perpetuated by the media and/or politicians.

Improving trust and effective communication also brings to question if research like this will be trusted by rural communities. Academics were the least trusted media source for issues/updates on rural communities. This suggests that academic research such as this one may not be well received by rural communities. However, this research is funded by AgResearch and associated with Lincoln University, which are both considered to be trusted organisations for science/evidence. It is also possible that as a member of the Tai Tokerau rural community, this will improve reception of the research findings. These various reasons bring to question if the best way to improve communications of environmental policy and planning documents to rural communities sits outside of academia. Perhaps instead of structured research approaches, less conventional grassroots 'learn as you' go approaches could be applied.

Te Tai Tokerau participants spoken to in this research affirmed Northland based research into Mangakahia Valley discussed in Chapter 3 (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000). The 2000 case study indicated that rural community consider farming to be the central point of rurality and also suggested that Māori were separate from the rural community. This was also reflected in this research over 20 years later by a small minority of participants who raised concerns about Māori influence and use of te reo Māori. It is interesting to note that these perspectives appear to have not evolved over time, despite policies and demographics changing. Although, due to the lack of young participants in this research, may reflect the older generations of rural Northlanders.

6.6 Summary

Overall, there are significant barriers or noise that prevent effective communication of policy and planning documents. Despite a consensus that the intent to improve environmental outcomes is good, implementation strategies are considered by most to be distrusted and drastic. A complex disconnect exists between intention and implementation; this combined with an ideological disparity between rural and urban communities, likely contributes to ineffective communication.

The points discussed in this chapter are drawn on in the following chapter to synthesize ideas and develop recommendations. These are both ideas for future research and ideas to improve the communication of environmental policy and planning documents to rural New Zealand. This aims to provide insights to enhance relationships and build trust in order to have a positive impact on our environment and the social fabric of ANZ.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This research has drawn on substantial literature regarding rural Aotearoa to address the research questions around the communication of environmental policy and planning documents to rural communities. Limited accessible research into the barriers to communication to rural communities in ANZ was identified through the research proposal process. This dissertation aims to provide insight into this research gap. The research has shown that trust is a significant barrier to the communication of these documents and has identified many factors that influence this trust. These factors include te reo, politics, industry reputation, science/evidence and education. The aforementioned influences are interconnected, with individuals being impacted by factors simultaneously. In addition, participants demonstrated a willingness to work towards building relationships and improving communication in the future. The main influences on effective communication are perceptions around environmental policy and planning as well as communication styles and sources. These findings, further research recommendations and general recommendations are explored in the following sections.

7.2 Addressing research questions

The overarching research question that guided this dissertation is: *what roles, if any, do communication styles and sources have in influencing rural communities' perceptions about environmental policy and regulations?* Alongside this, three sub-objectives informed the research. Firstly, *identify key causes of distrust from the rural community towards environmental planning and policy communication.* Secondly, *assess whether trust in environmental policy and planning documents is influenced by te reo use, trust of the science and the political party affiliations.* Lastly, *to identify trusted media sources within the rural community with an aim to understand the preferred communication channels.*

In order to answer these questions, interviews, surveys and document analysis were used to collect data relating to the case study of Northland, as well as the wider ANZ rural community. Interviews included central and local government politicians, tangata whenua, a vet, farmers, and rural representatives. The interviews aimed to give insight into how rural people receive and interpret communication on policy and planning. Surveys aimed to encapsulate the views of the rural general public, with surveys being in-person, online and at a farming discussion group. Document analysis of relevant policy and planning media sources was also conducted in order to contextualise the interview and survey data as well as provide a more in-depth analysis. Overall, there were 47 survey participants

and ten interview participants, so in total a sample of 57 was used. These methods and sample size provided a robust basis to draw conclusions from.

It was found that communication styles and sources have a role to play in influencing rural communities' perceptions on environmental policy and planning. Key causes of distrust towards policy and planning were identified as, the environmental/planning industry, the political nature of policy, distrust of science and evidence, te reo use as well as misinformation. This research found that te reo use, trust of the science and the political party associations does influence trust in policy and planning. Te reo use was found to not have an influence on trust for most of the sample; however, for a group of 40% it did have an impact on trust. This influence to trust was mostly negative and was largely attributed to a lack of understanding of te reo Māori. Science used to justify policy and planning documents was found to be not trusted by most participants, as was communication associated with political parties. Lastly, it was found that trusted media sources can be grouped into the following categories, with rural media, Federated Farmers and locals considered to be the most trusted sources.

7.3 Recommendations for further research

Many participants suggested that this research should have a wider reach; this broad process, unfortunately, was not possible within the scope of a MPlan dissertation. Further research with similar research topics across many rural regions in New Zealand should be considered. The dissertation methodology limitations, identified in Chapter 4.7, should be mitigated, including ensuring that the sample has more women and youth representation. A true bicultural approach with both Pākehā and tangata whenua researchers should also be considered. This research also could be expanded to look into the different rural demographics within each group, such as the differences between family farmers and corporate farmers. The research could then analyse the rural demographics to see if communication channels vary between types of involvement in the rural community.

Alongside a wider sample size, a more collaborative approach to further research could be considered. Instead of interviews and surveys, more informal discussions, such as collaborative working groups in person over a cup of tea or coffee, should be considered. This research makes it clear that academics are not trusted as a source; thus, breaking down these barriers between researchers and research participants will likely be an important component to consider. Furthermore, research should not be limited to conversations; instead, farm visits could be considered. These in-person visits would provide the opportunity to build better connections. This research would have to be conducted over an extended period of time and would likely benefit from researchers being connected to the rural areas that they were researching.

Further research should also be considered into the disconnect in trust between politics and policy and then the trust in Federated Farmers. Research could explore why this occurs in an attempt to reframe policy in a more trustworthy light. Strategies for mending the negative reputation of planners and the environmental industry could also be a consideration of this research.

Another consideration for further research is exploring the disconnect between distrust in science in policy, when compared to distrust in science in communication sources. The Tai Tokerau case study indicates that policy is critiqued to a higher level than communication sources. Research into why academics/universities are a trusted source for science, yet not trusted on policy should be explored. Distrust in evidence/science in policy is particularly interesting as policy is usually justified by academic/university research. Why this disconnect occurs should be explored. It is possible that it is due to policy having significant implications to rural communities, whereas, the media, journal articles and published science, have less impact to rural communities. Further analysis and research would be required to confirm this speculation.

An additional data inconsistency can be found between 'facts' or 'truth' being the reason why many participants trust a source, yet these same individuals do not trust the 'facts' or 'truth' behind policy and planning documents. Further research into this data inconsistency should be considered. It may be that evidence and science are not considered to be factual by the Northland rural community, or it may be that individuals are being selective in what they consider to be the truth.

Further research into the implications of the Treaty Principles Bill should be explored. This policy may increase misunderstanding of te reo and te ao Māori. The impacts of this may result in increased misunderstanding when communicating policy and planning documents to rural communities and to ANZ society more broadly.

A final consideration is research into how to mend the negative reputation of the planning and wider environmental industry. Part of this research could include considering if partnership approaches to policy and planning would improve trust. This research could also explore why partnerships with rural communities are advocated for by farmers, yet these same farmers raised concerns over partnerships and co-governance with tangata whenua.

These suggestions for further research, should be combined with the general recommendations from the case study of Northland. This will assist in improving the communication to rural communities in ANZ going forward.

7.4 General recommendations

The planning profession is an initial starting point to facilitate better communication with rural communities. One way to address this is to encourage more rural people into the planning profession. In my MPlan cohort, finishing November 2024, I am the only person from a rural background. Most students are drawn to urban planning and are from urban areas; perhaps there is an opportunity for the New Zealand Planning Institute (NZPI) to engage with rural schools to raise awareness of the planning profession. This could help to facilitate those from rural communities back into planning roles in their respective regions. Strategies could be drawn from other professions, for example, a study into medical immersion programmes, found that those who worked in the Northland ANZ region through a regional immersion role were more likely to continue to work in the region in their careers (Connell et al., 2022). This raises questions around why the planning industry does not have processes like these in place. Regional workplace placements through internships or graduate roles for regions, similar to that of medical immersion programmes should be explored. Rural councils could use these to increase awareness of rural planning and encourage planners to work in rural areas. Literature suggests that rural areas often experience brain drain, with many who leave rural areas never returning due to a range of factors (Chambers, 1983; Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Programmes that facilitate and encourage rural planning will assist in talent acquisition and will attract more desirable members of the workforce, thus reducing brain drain. This would likely improve planning and policy outcomes in rural regions as well as for ANZ holistically.

Those working in the industry should be aware of the potential negative perceptions associated with words such as 'environment', 'climate change' and 'planner'. Being mindful of language use and establishing rapport with rural communities prior to raising these issues will likely reduce barriers to effective communication. Careful use of words alongside an honest explanation of the role of planners as working with communities rather than solely regulating them will also likely improve public perception. When I introduced the research as 'environmental planning' related, this was received negatively by many in-person survey participants and some interview participants, indicating that these words should be avoided. In contrast, when I stated that I was from 'Lincoln University,' this had positive reactions from the rural communities spoken to. Perhaps planners who have studied at either Lincoln or Massey University should utilise the agricultural credibility these universities have when engaging with rural communities.

Shared life experience and connection to the area was considered to be important to participants. Planners, facilitators and regulators in the rural sector should not underestimate the importance of building connections and taking the time to listen to the rural sector. Some commented that communication or invitations to participate in policy creation to rural communities felt like a tick-box

exercise. These tokenistic feelings need to be mitigated in order to provide spaces for open and constructive two-way dialogue. Potential ways to reduce this include in-person conversations that go beyond consultation into understanding rural dynamics and values. Consultation should not just be on the issue at hand but instead go further into understanding how each individual fits into the puzzle that creates each unique rural community.

Connections should not be overlooked; academics such as planners and other professionals appear to not have the social license to consult with rural communities. They are considered by many as out-of-touch academics. It even goes down to the small things of how these individuals dress, with comments made about city people in fancy clothes speaking to rural communities they knew nothing about. These out-of-touch concerns are reflected by the Rural News articles describing politicians as '*political suits*' wearing '*new, polished red bands*' (Burke, 2023, p3). To my in-person survey at the Kaikohe stock sale yards I wore my well-worn red bands, jeans and a t-shirt, this combined with my rural connection to the area likely resulted in an increased level of trust. I drove to the sale in an unwashed farm ute, it was abundantly clear at first glance that despite being an academic, I did not fit into the 'city' trope critiqued by many in rural communities.

Some participants were shocked to learn that ANZ universities do not offer rural-specific planning papers or degrees (Lincoln University, n.d.; University of Otago, n.d.; University of Auckland, n.d.; Massey University, n.d.; Waikato University, n.d.). This is despite rural activities such as agriculture and horticulture being the predominant land use in New Zealand (StatsNZ, 2021). Planning as an industry directly relates to land use, so the lack of rural-specific education can be considered a flaw in planning education in ANZ. Due to this, many graduate planners in ANZ are ill-equipped to work with rural communities and have to learn by doing rather than being supported with a theoretical university-based understanding. Perhaps institutions teaching in New Zealand should consider incorporating a rural-specific paper into education systems to address the lack of understanding and exposure most of the population has to rural communities. Other countries, such as Canada, offer rural planning specific degrees and offer courses that specifically target the unique challenges rural communities face (University of Guelph, n.d.). Many topics covered by an NZPI accredited planning degree are targeted toward urban planning and the University of Auckland offers urban planning specific degrees (University of Auckland, n.d.). This makes sense when considering ANZ is a highly urbanised nation; however, regional planning faces unique challenges. Rural planning can be considered as a knowledge gap in ANZ planning education. Universities should consider teaching rural planning courses alongside urban planning courses.

Another consideration could be utilising expert/community working groups to separate politics and policy and provide local community representation. These groups should be considered as a representation of all as opposed to purely academics, as these are found to be untrusted by case study participants, with only 0.05% of respondents trusting academics¹³. A combination of experts and rural representatives who understand their communities through their own lived experiences and connections with the wider community should be considered for these working groups. These groups could result in shared learning, where the role of planners is considered as more of a facilitator between groups, similar to that described in transactive planning theory (Parker, 2014). However, localised planning that considers rural communities would be costly and require significant resource investment in order to represent a small percentage of the population.

Effective translations of te reo Māori should also be considered; in policy documents, this is currently done quite effectively. However, public documents often lack the same level of translation. It is important to communicate te reo better in publicly accessible documents so that English speakers with no te reo understanding can understand it. This will likely reduce confusion and misunderstanding around te reo. If language is communicated and translated effectively, then it may increase English speaker's understanding of te reo Māori. These translations should be considered carefully and agreed upon by iwi and hapū to ensure no mistranslation or mis-intended interpretations occur. Perhaps increased education around the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, te ao Māori, te reo and mātauranga Māori to the rural public would also assist in reducing misunderstandings and confusion. This could be implemented through both the primary and high school education systems, as well as by teaching this as part of agricultural related university programmes. Alternatively, te reo could be removed from policy and planning documents in order to reduce miscommunication. Removal of te reo would satisfy concerns raised by a minority of survey participants who consider not using te reo to be how to improve communications to rural communities. However, removal of te reo would go against Treaty obligations and te reo is an official language of ANZ due to the Māori Language Act 1987 so only including English in policy and planning is not a reasonable course of action.

Direct communication should also be explored to reduce the chances of messages being impacted by noise. An interview participant raised the suggestion of communicating directly with farming paper editors. This could be explored as a potential direct way of communicating to rural communities through a well trusted channel. Communication directly to Federated Farmers should also be explored, in an attempt to reduce the impact of messaging being mistranslated when it is communicated through multiple individuals or groups before reaching the intended audience.

¹³ Based on a sample size of 44 respondents.

7.5 Conclusions

Overall, these findings illustrate the need for effective two-way communication going forward. Trust and positive relationships with rural communities need to be established in order for this communication to occur. Improving communication going forward will be challenging. However, this should not deter planners, government and councils from taking the rural community along for the journey towards shared intentions around improving environmental outcomes. These actions, alongside open and honest dialogue, can ensure trust is established and our environment is cared for.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

The following questions were used to guide the in-person and Microsoft Teams interviews.

A.1 Questions

Interview question list (including examples of probing questions used as required)

1. What is your connection to the rural/northland rural community?
2. Do you agree or disagree with the national level environmental policy/planning reforms we have seen over the period since the Labour Government was elected in 2017?
3. Why do you agree / disagree? [probe- In particular, do you have any views on the National Policy Statement (NPS) on Highly Productive Land, the NPS – Freshwater Management, or the NPS- Indigenous Biodiversity? Why do you hold those views?
4. How did you obtain your understanding of these policies?
5. Who (what media) do you trust for news/updates on environmental policy and planning? Who (what media) do you not trust?
6. Who (what media) do you trust for news/updates on rural issues? Who (what media) do you not trust?
7. Why do you trust / not trust these media/communication channels / sources?
8. Do you trust communication that has affiliations with political parties? Why/why not?
9. Do you trust the evidence/science behind policy/planning documents? Why/why not?
10. Do you consider trust/relationship building to be a barrier to effective communication of policy/planning documents? Why/why not?
11. Does the use of Māori language/te reo (e.g. te mana o te wai) in a policy document influence your level of trust in the policy? If so, in what way does it influence your level of trust?
12. How do you think communication of policy/planning documents to rural communities could be improved? Why?

Appendix B

In-person survey questions

B.1 Introduction/prelude

Survey as part of master's research into the communication of policy and planning documents to rural communities with a focus on Northland / Tai Tokerau.

Project context:

This project is my dissertation research undertaken as part of my Master of Planning degree at Lincoln University. It is partly funded by the Our Land and Water National Science Challenge, which is hosted by AgResearch, and by Lincoln University. The research is independent, and the results will be publicly available.

Project aim:

The aim of this project is to examine how rural communities receive and interpret information around environmental planning and policy. This research aims to contribute to the limited research into the effectiveness of communication to rural communities on environmental policy and planning.

Please circle your chosen answers:

B.2 Questions

1. Do you consent to anonymously participate in this research? Yes/No
2. Do you reside in the Northland / Te Tai Tokerau rural community? Yes/No
3. Do you consider yourself to be part of the Northland rural community? Yes/No
4. What is your involvement in the Northland rural community?
5. Do you consider a lack of trust to be a barrier to effective communication of policy/planning documents? Yes/No
6. Do you generally agree with the environmental policy/planning reform we have seen over recent years? For example: National Policy Statements (national directives from central government created under the Resource Management Act) such as the National Policy Statement on freshwater that incorporates the principle of Te Mana o te Wai. These documents set requirements that councils must then incorporate into their regional planning documents. This has recently occurred in Northland with the Northland Regional Council seeking feedback on the setback for fencing of waterways in response to the NPS on freshwater management. Yes/No
7. Do you disagree with all/most of the policy change or just the freshwater management example provided? All/most of it or Just the freshwater management policy example
8. Do you generally trust the evidence/science behind policy/planning documents? Yes/No
9. Does the use of Māori language/te reo (e.g. Te Mana o te Wai) in a policy document influence your level of trust in the policy? Yes/No
10. If yes, in what way does it influence your trust?
11. Who do you consider are trusted sources of news/updates on rural issues? (please list)
12. Why do you trust these communication channels / sources?
13. Is the level of trust influenced by trust of the science used as evidence by the sources? Yes/No
14. If yes, in what way does your trust in the science used by the source influence your level of trust in the source?
15. Is the level of trust in these sources influenced by their use of te reo? Yes/No

16. If yes, in what way does it influence your trust?
17. Who do you consider to be trusted sources of evidence/science? (please list)
18. Who do you consider are trusted sources of news/updates on rural issues? (Please list)
19. Do you generally trust communication that has affiliations with political parties? Yes/No
20. How do you think communication of policy/planning documents to rural communities could be improved?

Appendix C

Online survey questions

C.1 Introduction/prelude

Survey as part of Masters research into the communication of policy and planning documents to rural communities with a focus on Northland / Tai Tokerau.

Kia ora! My name is Kaya, and I am studying my Masters in Planning at Lincoln University and am researching environmental policy and planning communication in rural Aotearoa New Zealand with a focus on Te Tai Tokerau Northland. I grew up on a family farm just out of Kaikohe that has been farmed by my family for over 100 years, so this is a topic close to my heart. I would love your participation in a short survey that will take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Project context: This project is my dissertation research undertaken as part of my Master of Planning degree at Lincoln University. It is partly funded by the Our Land and Water National Science Challenge, which is hosted by AgResearch, and by Lincoln University. The research is independent, and the results will be publicly available.

Project aim: The aim of this project is to examine how rural communities receive and interpret information around environmental planning and policy. This research aims to contribute to the limited research into the effectiveness of communication to rural communities on environmental policy and planning.

C.2 Questions

1. Do you consent to anonymously participate in this research? Yes/No
2. Do you reside in the Northland / Te Tai Tokerau rural community? Yes/No
3. Do you consider yourself to be part of the Northland rural community? Yes/No
4. What is your involvement in the Northland rural community?
5. Do you generally agree with the environmental policy/planning reform we have seen over recent years? For example: National Policy Statements (national directives from central government created under the Resource Management Act) such as the National Policy Statement on freshwater that incorporates the principle of Te Mana o te Wai. These documents set requirements that councils must then incorporate into their regional planning documents. This has recently occurred in Northland with the Northland Regional Council seeking feedback on the setback for fencing of waterways in response to the NPS on freshwater management. Yes/Maybe/No
6. Do you disagree with all/most of the policy change or just the freshwater management example provided? All/most of it or Just the freshwater management policy example
7. Do you generally trust the evidence/science behind policy/planning documents? Yes/Maybe/No

8. Does the use of Māori language/te reo (e.g. Te Mana o te Wai) in a policy document influence your level of trust in the policy? Yes/Maybe/No
9. If yes, in what way does it influence your trust?
10. Who do you consider are trusted sources of news/updates on rural issues? (please list)
11. Why do you trust these communication channels / sources?
12. Is the level of trust influenced by trust of the science used as evidence by the sources?
Yes/Maybe/No
13. If yes, in what way does your trust in the science used by the source influence your level of trust in the source?
14. Is the level of trust in these sources influenced by their use of te reo? Yes/Maybe/No
15. If yes, in what way does it influence your trust?
16. Who do you consider to be trusted sources of evidence/science? (please list)
17. Who do you consider are trusted sources of news/updates on rural issues? (Please list)
18. Do you generally trust communication that has affiliations with political parties? Yes/Maybe/No
19. How do you think communication of policy/planning documents to rural communities could be improved?

Appendix D

Ethics approval letter



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HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Application: HEC2024-18

4th June 2024

Title: Environmental policy and planning communication in rural Aotearoa New Zealand with a focus on Te Tai Tokerau Northland.

Applicant: Kaya Tobin

The Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee has reviewed the above noted application.

Thank you for your response to the questions which were forwarded to you on the Committee's behalf.

I am satisfied on the Committee's behalf that the issues of concern have been satisfactorily addressed. I am pleased to give final approval to your project with a note for consideration.

- We do not consider the interview data in this project to be sufficiently sensitive to require 'audio only' in MS Teams interviews, but please note that, even though Microsoft Teams has no "audio only" recording option, this could still be achieved through other technical means. These options are worth bearing in mind for any future research.

Please note that this approval is valid for three years from today's date at which time you will need to reapply for approval.

Once your field work has finished can you please advise the Human Ethics Secretary at ethics@lincoln.ac.nz, to advise completion and confirm that you have complied with the terms of the ethical approval.

May I, on behalf of the Committee, wish you success in your research.

Regards

Caitriona Cameron, Deputy Chair
Human Ethics Committee

PLEASE NOTE: The Human Ethics Committee has an audit process in place for applications. Please see 7.3 of the Human Ethics Committee Operating Procedures (ACHE) in the Lincoln University Policies and Procedures Manual for more information.



Appendix E

Trusted media sources for updates on rural issues

Date/Type	Occupation	Agree with policy	Full answer	Source themes
Online:				
P1	Rural professional	No	Federated farmers, Beef - Lamb policy, Farmers Weekly, country wide etc (general news)	Industry, rural media, rural representatives, general news
P2	Farm consultant	Yes	Federated Farmers, Rural Support Trust, DairyNZ	Industry, rural representatives
P3	Dairy farmer	No	Federated Farmers, Groundswell, Tararua Union	Rural representatives
P4	Farming	Yes	Newspapers, Farmers Weekly, Rural News	Rural media
P5	No response	No	Farming based news outlets eg farmers weekly	Rural media
P6	Farmer	Maybe	Farmers association's	Rural representatives
P7	No response	Yes	Documents and Articles from the source KCC/NRC/KMF/MPI and so on	Policy documents
P8	Farmer	Maybe	Federated Farmers	Rural representatives
P9	Dairy farmer	Maybe	That's a good question because the answer is no one. It is a balance of information from many sources.	No-one
P10	Farmer	No	There are no trusted sources.	No-one
P11	Qualhu resident and small farmer	Yes	Academics	Academics
D1 In-person:				
P1	no response	no response	One news, NZ Herald	General media
P2	no response	no	Rural News	Rural media
P3	rural contractor / farmer	Maybe	Beef+Hamb, DairyNZ, Federated Farmers	Industry, rural representatives
P4	Farming	no	Federated farmers, beef+hamb	Industry, rural representatives
P5	Stock truck driver	no	News/medical/farmers weekly	General media, rural media
P6	No response	no	Federated farmers	Rural representatives
P7	Horticulture/agriculture	no	Horticulture NZ	Rural representatives
P8	stock agent / farmer	no	Groundswell, federated farmers	Rural representatives
D2 In-person:				
P1	no response	Yes	Locals	Locals
P2	farmer	no	Beef+hamb, nobody	Industry, no one
P3	stock agent, farmer	no	Nones, farmers weekly	No-one, rural media
P4	farmer	no	Stock agent	Industry
P5	contracting stock truck, horticulture	yes	Rural news	Rural media
P6	beef farming	no	Farmers / local residents	Locals, rural media
P7	farming, sports, work, kids	no	Local farmers, rural papers ie farmers weekly	Locals, rural media
P8	Beef farmer	no	Rural delivery TV	Rural media
P9	no response	yes	Local newspapers / news, local community like local scientist or environmentalist	Locals, general media
P10	no response	no	Rural news	Rural media
P11	farming, flood protection	no	Nobody / really	No-one
Interviews:				
P1	politician	no	Local community, court decisions, policy/briefs, general media	Locals, policy/documents, general media
P2	Politician	maybe	networking, local gov space, iw space - hapu meetings	Locals, policy/documents
P3	Rural representative	maybe	In NZ no one really... independent, partly govt.	No-one
P4	Rural representative	no	No one. The media in NZ takes a slant. Tends to go on ministry websites - no slant.	policy documents
P5	Rural representative	yes	local community, NZ Herald/stuff, social media, consider who it is from and bias	Locals, general media
P6	Politician	no	Don't trust news as much as he used to - least investigative journalism, should be backed up and have references eg research papers, fed farmers	No-one, academic/research, rural reps
P7	Planner	yes	federated farmers, policy/ministry, local community	Locals, policy/documents, rural representatives
P8	Politician	no	Doesn't necessarily trust one above the other, conscious of persons background.	No-one
P9	Farmer & farm consultant	no	agricultural papers, local community	Rural media, locals
P10	Farmer, vet, farm tourism	maybe	social media, rural newspapers, MNC, horter	Rural media, industry, policy
Other:				
P1	Farmer	Did not respond	No one	No one
P2	Farmer	No	Federated farmers / farm discussion group	Locals, rural reps
P3	Land owner	No	Farmers, Farmers Weekly	Locals, rural media
P4	Farmer	No	Farm discussion groups	Locals

Appendix F

Trusted sources of science

Theme	Responses
Independent experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject matter experts, scientists, ecologists • Proven scientists like Doug Edmeades and Jacqueline Rowarth • Alan Emmeron • Independent scientists – not journalists • Einstein
Agricultural science organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AgKnowledge • AgResearch • AgResearch • AgResearch
Universities/academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University studies • Universities but I would like to see the wider rural public also canvassed for out comes from their hands on lifetime experience • Peer reviewed journal articles • Academics • Papers from Lincoln • Some universities here in NZ – like Otago
No-one	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one source • Nobody • No-one • No-one
Rural issues/updates communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One news / NZ Herald • Farmers weekly • Same as rural issues/updates • Horticulture NZ (same response as rural issues/updates)