

## REPORT ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON CLIMATE ISSUES IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND



**Summary of key findings from a series of meetings with Regional, District and City Councils.**

**‘The Road Trip’ September/October 2022  
Brian Dixon & Terri Morrissey**

**July 2023**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report is based on a series of meetings on the “Road Trip” undertaken by Brian Dixon and Terri Morrissey during September and October 2022, on a workshop held in Wellington on October 18 2022 given by Terri Morrissey, Dr Richard Plenty and Brian Dixon on Uncertainty and Change, and a further meeting with Canterbury councils’ personnel on November 29/30, 2022.

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This work is a collaboration between psychologists from Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. It draws on the collaborative work carried out by those from Ireland and New Zealand, in particular, in relation to climate issues and community engagement.

The focus of the ‘Road Trip’ was to engage with local and regional councils (elected representatives and staff) to discover how they involved their communities in climate discussions and action and what methods were being used and proving successful. We also wanted to find out what role psychologists could play in helping facilitate community engagement; how communities dealt with issues such as change and uncertainty and how we could best focus our efforts as consultants into the future.

The meetings were typically of two hours in length and covered similar topics based on a semi structured questionnaire format either in person or via zoom. In reality, however, we spent many meetings in conversation with the participants asking us questions about motivation, engagement and how to bring about changes in behaviour and mindset!

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Our key findings were:

- The most striking finding was the number and variety of climate projects and initiatives undertaken by the councillors and council staff we met. These ranged in scope and topic including regional plans, risk assessments, specific projects on transportation, coastal erosion, water quality, agriculture, effects on communities and Hapu, sustainable investments, adaptation planning and biodiversity.
- Most of the Councillors we met with understood the relationship of climate engagement to the “Four Wellbeings” that Councils are required by law to promote (social, economic, environmental, and cultural). However, some expressed frustration that little is done to address the latter two of these and there was a stated desire that support and resources to engage with communities on climate issues could provide pathways for better meeting these responsibilities.

- The key challenge centred around how to get community engagement to work; how to involve people and how to make change happen. Our interviewees were also interested in issues such as motivation and incentivising people to make changes.
- A key variable which they felt could make a difference was funding for specific initiatives such as adaptation measures to climate change and how to wean people off cars and increase use of public transportation.
- We have analysed these key issues and propose a number of recommendations based on these. They centre around capacity building and training and development of community engagement facilitators.
- We believe that funding towards these initiatives would expedite the mindset and behaviour change necessary for climate action and equip community leaders, councillors, and other agents of change to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- We outline some challenges of change and some useful resources in the presentation points attached to this summary report.
- There is already quite a lot of activity happening on the ground. It would make sense to connect the various groups and councils to share ideas, methods, and findings, thus creating a data bank of successful interventions and initiatives. This would provide a resource for other community engagement initiatives to use and draw on. Communication about and documentation of less successful programmes and those that fail are also important to assist learning about factors that contribute to or undermine efficacy.
- Pilot projects could also be supported (in line with Minister Shaw's comments), monitored and evaluated to see what works in practice; to amplify and replicate in other areas without too many bureaucratic rules and regulations attached, to maximise impact.
- We discovered that academic research mahi is being done to determine the needs of hapu and whānau whose marae are predicted to be significantly affected by rising sea levels. Unfortunately, limited time and resources prevented us being able to appropriately and adequately include in the 'Road trip' discussions with representatives of Māori communities. That said, some of the viewpoints expressed to us were from Māori councillors and staff and related to programmes being run with, or parallel with, Hapu.
- Training in the use of change models, tools and community engagement methods for key actors will be an essential and integral part of enabling this change to take place.
- The creation of a national team of "climate change agents", trained in these tools and working with local and regional groups is recommended.
- The idea of a National Network of community engagement actions/projects on climate change could also be considered.

- Psychologists can play a key role in this work. They can offer support in the following areas:
  - Help in understanding human behaviour and attitude change
  - Understanding of larger systems and organisational change
  - Evidence based knowledge of incentives for change
  - Help in dealing with uncertainty
  - Insight into how to communicate with and motivate different stakeholders
  - Training for officials and elected representatives in engagement models and programmes
  - Psychologists who have expertise in working with Māori will have particularly valuable contributions to make in supporting Iwi and Hapu-based services and programmes.

## THE ROAD TRIP

### What was the “road trip”?

For several months in advance, Psychologist Brian Dixon contacted councillors, prospective councillors and staff of councils who were identified as having an interest in engaging with their communities on environmental issues. Their expressions of interest in meeting to discuss this were noted and, wherever practicable, dates and times for in-person meetings were negotiated and scheduled.

When Irish psychologist Terri Morrissey arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand in early September, she and Brian agreed on the questions and meeting format and commenced the “road trip”, initially focusing on the North Island and then the South Island. While most of the “in person” meetings were concluded in September, several meetings occurred online in September and in October 2022. Arranging meetings was constrained by the holding of local body elections in early October and this also meant some were unwilling or unable to schedule a time to meet due to other priorities. But the generosity of the councillors, candidates and staff during what is a busy and stressful time for them is greatly appreciated.

The focus of our meetings was primarily on community engagement relating to climate issues. The participants in the discussions varied from meeting to meeting but were mostly with councillors and staff of: Regional councils, District councils and City councils. We also were able to meet with some people actively working on environmental projects with communities, an electorate MP with a passionate interest in community engagement and climate action (MP for Auckland Central) and the Minister for Climate Change and his advisers and Ministry for the Environment staff.

### Who we met:

The specific breakdown of meetings participants follows:

Auckland Central MP

Tauranga – Candidates

Bay of Plenty Regional council councillors & staff

Hamilton- Waikato Regional councillors

Waikato - Action group leaders  
Parliament- Climate Change Minister & officials  
Kapiti Coast District councillor, Mayor, and a project coordinator  
Dunedin City - councillor  
Otago Regional councillors, candidate (and staff)  
ECAN – councillor (online)  
Queenstown-Lakes District Council – councillors  
Canterbury staff and project coordinators (online)  
Canterbury region staff (ECAN and District Councils - online)

### **What's working well? (examples)**

Participants identified the following positive features and developments:

Local Initiatives: A number of councils mentioned ones specific to their area (It's Time Canterbury; Southern Lakes Sanctuary; Sustainable Queenstown)

Working with Catchment groups

Doing risk assessment: local and regional

Local funding for projects

The Enviro Schools Programme

Climate action groups

Facilitating community engagement

### **What's not working so well?**

Amongst the negative factors, participants noted the following:

Limited support for Local Government: low election turnout

Long-term vs annual planning

Consultation process: seen as too formal

Private enterprise entering local government agenda

Competition for funds

Staffing issues: e.g. pay (bus drivers)

Need to inspire big change

### **Any difficulties?**

Specific problem areas highlighted included:

Issues re use of rate payers' money

Government funding lagging behind local government commitments

Increasing rates bills

"Townies telling farmers what to do"

High debt and level of investment in farming community

How funds are used: priorities

Who pays: for initiatives and action?

### **Enablers**

The main things facilitating climate-related engagement were seen as being:

Empowerment programmes (e.g. Enviro-schools)

Local initiatives

Systems that assist involvement/engagement

Companies willing to get involved

## **Blockers**

The impediments to climate-related engagement noted by participants included:

- Lack of trained facilitators for climate action
- Some Council staff not on board
- Some school principals less interested/supportive
- Bureaucratic process obstacles
- Systemic barriers (e.g. emphasis on growth vs degrowth; racism)
- Ethnic differences causing barriers (e.g. communication)
- Some discounting of climate issues on Council
- Debt/banks
- Big corporations
- Sector resistance (e.g. transport, agriculture, tourism)
- Payment issues

## **Those needing particular support**

Participants readily identified groups requiring assistance/encouragement to engage:

- Tenants who don't have a voice
- People in poor housing
- Deprived communities: climate is not top of their agenda
- Māori and Pasifika – struggling to just survive (climate action is often NOT a priority)
- The privileged & “Upwardly mobile”: not aware of (or don't care about) the consequences of their behaviours
- Young people lacking in social and life skills

## **What support do Councils need?**

Comments on the needs of Councils to lead engagement were:

- Funding for local groups/access to funding
- Ways of making change acceptable
- More trained facilitators
- Education of staff/councillors
- Help in communicating with key stakeholders/public
- Help in building community resilience
- Need government mandate (legislation)
- Focus on communication skills
- Leadership

## **Key issues raised, included:**

- Public transport systems - national, regional, local levels
- Transportation - products/goods/services
- Farming practices
- Sustainable Tourism
- Coastal erosion
- Water quality; wastewater; waterway health, water resilience
- Poverty in deprived areas
- Public (especially youth) engagement
- Need progressive rating system
- Food growing
- Extreme weather events

### **Some further suggestions from participants:**

Need to involve young people  
Involve other stakeholders: lawyers; SME's; Chambers of Commerce  
Indigenous perspectives need to be taken into account, heard, empowered  
Need skills in communication; how to effect behaviour change  
People need to take responsibility for themselves  
Need jobs in nature and "sustainable tourism"  
Corporate change needed  
The environment and the community could be "shareholders" in companies  
Need to change emphasis from growth to degrowth  
Purpose over profit  
Need Climate Change Funding Agency  
Funding must come from rates and taxes  
How can you reduce uncertainty?

### **Suggested Roles for Psychologists**

The participants were invited to state how they thought psychologists might be able to assist them with their community engagement:

- Support was expressed for climate psychology/social psychology
- Providing evidence-based information
- Help in understanding behaviour and attitude change
- Help in dealing with uncertainty
- Understanding of incentives for change
- How to communicate messages to different stakeholders
- How to motivate different stakeholders
- Training for staff and councillors in engagement programmes

Brian Dixon and Terri Morrissey  
July 2023

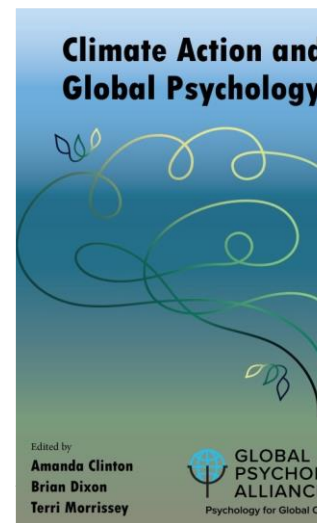
## SOME USEFUL REFERENCES

1. **‘Climate Action and Global Psychology’** offers a unique, multi-national perspective on organised psychology’s nascent collaborative efforts to address the world’s climate crisis. This volume is a combination of theoretical and empirical work, varying according to section and topic:

Clinton, A., Dixon, B. and Morrissey, T. (eds) ‘Climate Action and Global Psychology e-book’ (New Zealand Psychological Society: 2022)

[https://www.psychology.org.nz/application/files/1116/6744/8139/ClimateAction\\_and\\_Global\\_Psychology.pdf](https://www.psychology.org.nz/application/files/1116/6744/8139/ClimateAction_and_Global_Psychology.pdf)

See in particular: Morrissey, T. and Plenty, R., ‘Leading on climate in times of uncertainty and change’ pp182-217



### 2. Climate Action – what you can do in your community

Irish Government’s Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (June 2019, updated March 2021)

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/climate-action-community/>

*Imagining2050 Project: Innovative Methods of Community Engagement: towards a Low Carbon Climate Resilient Future Workshop Proceedings*, Alexandra Revez & Gerard Mullally, May, 2019, *Environmental Research Institute, University College Cork, Ireland*

Chapters in: Clayton & Manning (eds) *Psychology and climate change. Human Perceptions, Impacts, and Responses* (2018)

‘Psychological perspectives on community resilience and climate change: Insights, examples, and directions for future research’

‘Climate-change resilient communities should have planning, development, and infrastructure that help the community adapt to climate change risks’

### 3. Role of central government

Central government sets the direction so that New Zealand’s people, environment, economy, and national infrastructure, are more resilient to the impacts of climate change

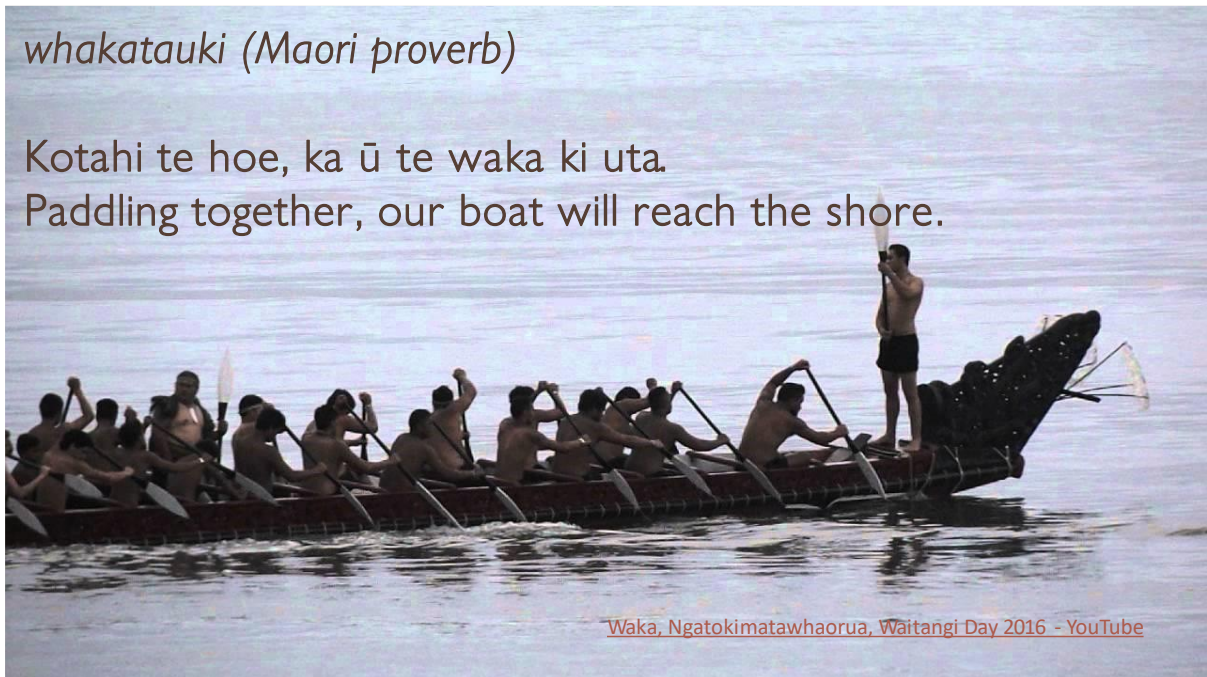
- provides the legislative and policy framework
- provides information and guidance to support local government and businesses to make effective adaptation decisions
- funds research and publishes information on climate change impacts
- prepares for and responds to major natural hazard events

*Source: NZ Ministry for the Environment website*



*whakatauki (Maori proverb)*

Kotahi te hoe, ka ū te waka ki uta.  
Paddling together, our boat will reach the shore.



[Waka, Ngatokimatawhaorua, Waitangi Day 2016 - YouTube](#)