

Thriving Southland:

**Delivering effective backbone support for
Catchment Group success**



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Report Information

Prepared for Thriving Southland

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Research team

Judy Oakden of Pragmatica Limited developed this report with input from the internal Thriving Southland project team.

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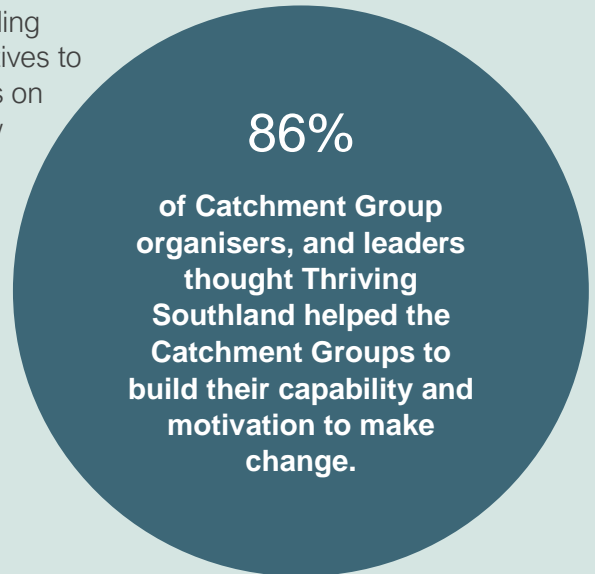
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Executive summary

Thriving Southland facilitates improved outcomes for farmers

Thriving Southland has an established record of providing effective backbone support to Catchment Group initiatives to achieve meaningful on-farm change. This report draws on a range of survey and administrative data to show how the support has evolved over time and the ways it directly benefits farmers.

Catchment Group organisers and leaders (respondents) recently surveyed¹ described how they believed that Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups over time. Most respondents observed that Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups *a lot* or *quite a lot* to build their capability and motivation to make change.



What did Thriving Southland achieve?

Respondents said Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups and farmers *a lot* or *quite a lot* to:

- build their capability and motivation to make change (86%)
- better understand their farm- and catchment-specific challenges and opportunities (89%)
- build quality relationships and connections with scientists and other experts (89%)
- become more informed about the science options open to them and how to tackle them (83%)
- collaborate with other farmers to find possible solutions for their farms and catchments (89%)
- focus on changes in water quality, climate or biodiversity that are priorities for the local community (91%)
- identify the steps farmers could take to make an action plan for their farm (75%)
- support other farmers to drive positive change and take proactive steps toward farming for the future (89%).

Thriving Southland is an effective backbone organisation

Thriving Southland acts as an effective backbone organisation, which is defined as one that can “guide vision and strategy, support aligned activities, establish shared measurement practices, build public will, advance policy, and mobilize funding” (Turner, Merchant, Martin, & Kania, 2012). Since its formation, Thriving Southland has steadily increased stakeholder participation across a breadth and depth of activities, supporting Catchment Group initiatives to achieve meaningful on-farm change.

¹ Between 2 July and 6 August 2024, 35 Catchment Group organisers and leaders completed a survey.

Strong participation in 2024

In total, 3,684 participants attended a diverse range of events and activities run by either the Catchment Groups or Thriving Southland in the year ended 31 May 2024. This variety reflects a commitment to engaging with the community in diverse ways:



- **Catchment Groups ran 169 science and learning events and activities**, attracting 1,925 participants. Around 20% of Catchment Group members went to each other's activities.
- **Catchment Groups also ran 64 events with an engagement or social wellbeing focus**, attracting 1,364 participants.
- **Thriving Southland ran five events** attracting 395 participants, including the AGM, Agritech event, and the stakeholder breakfast including the Catchment Group Leaders Forum.

Thriving Southland's backbone support helps achieve shifts in key ways

As the following table shows, respondents reported major improvements in the way their Catchment Groups functioned to support on-farm change.

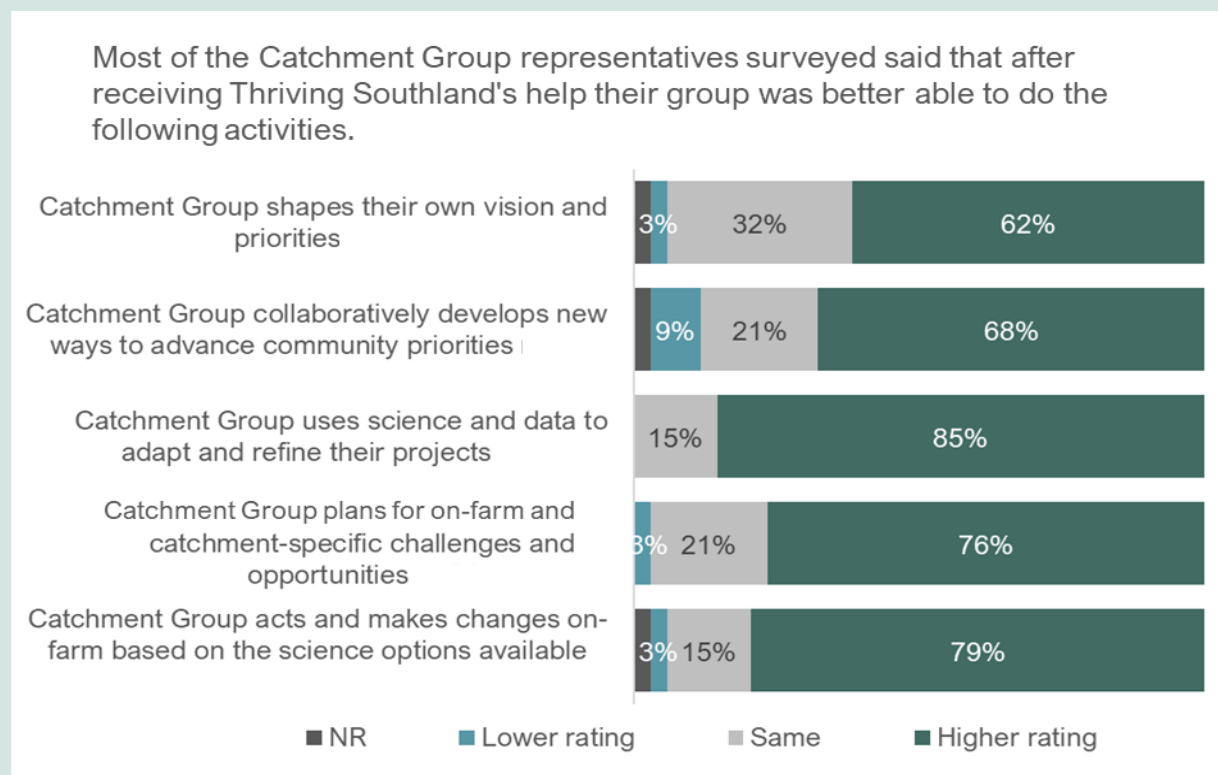
After receiving support from Thriving Southland, respondents said their Catchment Group could ...	Respondents giving <i>quite a lot</i> or <i>a lot</i> ratings (n=35)	
	At the start	In 2024
• shape their own vision and priorities	25%	75%
• collaborate to develop new ways to advance community priorities	23%	78%
• use science and data to adapt and refine their projects.	14%	83%
• plan for on-farm challenges and opportunities	28%	94%
• make on-farm changes based on the science options open to them	15%	74%

Attracting funding and resources in-kind

Stakeholders are also committing to co-funding, where people and organisations in the community want to contribute financially and in-kind. There was good buy-in to the Catchment Group projects, and two-thirds of Catchment Group members reported giving time and resources *a lot* or *quite a lot* to further their Catchment Group projects.

Shifts reported are meaningful in a statistical sense

The chart below shows that after receiving help from Thriving Southland, most respondents saw positive differences across key aspects of Catchment Group activity that support change, when compared with the start of their involvement. The changes reflected in the following charts are all statistically significant – and clearly so – providing a strong basis for confidence in the effectiveness of Thriving Southland’s work. Overall, over two in three respondents gave a higher rating for all key aspects. The biggest shift (85%) was for *Catchment Groups using science and data to adapt and refine their projects*.



Conclusion

Overall, there is unmistakable evidence from a range of sources that Thriving Southland is an **effective backbone organisation** because it:

- works as a catalyst for achieving community-led progress, and supports building a shared understanding of farmers’ issues in different catchments and possible mitigation actions
- supports sharing scientific information within and between Catchment Groups to inform farmer choices
- provides continuous communication that helps build community trust, supports work towards mutual objectives and amplifies common motivations.

However, based on the feedback from Catchment Group organisers and leaders, the momentum gained requires ongoing coordination from an organisation such as Thriving Southland. Making the connections between groups and facilitating meetings, particularly where farmers are trying to set their vision and strategy, help the groups make links with science and amplify the common motivations. Without this ongoing support, the gains Catchment Groups have made to date are likely to be considerably slowed or potentially lost.

Introduction

Background

The Southland farming community faces many challenges and opportunities, including the external pressure of regulations and compliance, climate change, and mixed perceptions about agriculture among some in the population. At a farm system level farmers also deal with daily challenges, including weather, consumer markets, wintering, water quality and farming in isolated areas.

A cross-sector group of farmers established Thriving Southland in December 2020, funded by a Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) *Change and Innovation Project* to address these challenges. Thriving Southland builds on the earlier work of the New Zealand Landcare Trust. MPI provides most of the funding for the project through the *Sustainable Land Use Programme*.

Initially \$6 million was assigned to the project for 2020 to 2023, with a further \$1.2 million assigned for the year ended 31 May 2024. The *Change and Innovation Project* aimed to help farmers adapt, change and respond to compliance needs, and prove themselves as leaders in the primary sector. Thriving Southland has funding for one more round, and **this report provides a summary of achievements over the past four years for key metrics.**

Thriving Southland provides a cross-sector platform for collaboration, by farmers, for farmers.

Thriving Southland aims to:

- support primary producers with transparent, well-resourced regional leadership and coordination
- ensure Southland's primary sector is agile and adaptable to change
- support Southland's primary production sector to develop and market its regional story.

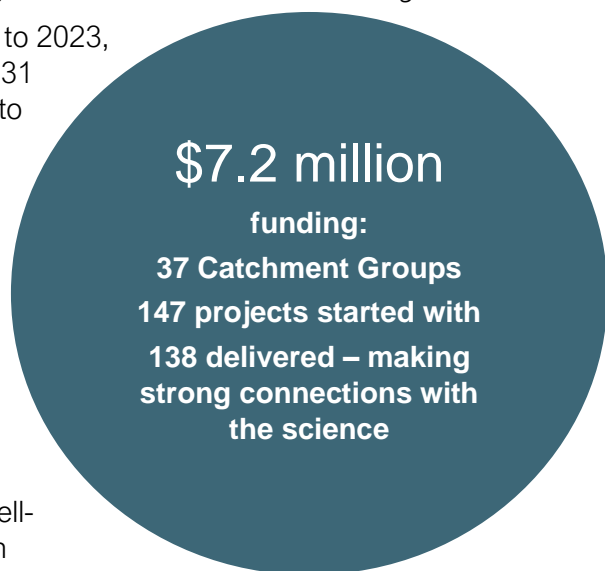
Therefore, as part of its role, **Thriving Southland provides backbone support** to empower farmers to take ownership of, address and resolve their local issues and challenges, and perceive them as opportunities. Thriving Southland's team of dedicated coordinators connect with members of the farming community to:

- provide support to develop and sustain Catchment Groups
- make connections to access science
- encourage farmers to make evidence-based decisions for change.

Currently, there are 37 active Catchment Groups, with one new catchment since 2023. Catchment Groups continue to flourish with Thriving Southland's backbone support, advice and funding.

Study purpose

For the fourth year, Thriving Southland has commissioned a study from Pragmatica Limited. This year's study shows some more recent progress as well as longer-term achievements and



benefits experienced by the Catchment Groups funded through the *Change and Innovation Project*. The study explores the ongoing benefits for the Southland farming community from joining the Catchment Groups and receiving support from Thriving Southland. It focuses on the story of Thriving Southland providing support to Catchment Groups.

This year's report has two key areas of focus:

1. The **improved outcomes to farmers** in terms of:
 - building capability and motivation to change
 - making changes to farming practice
2. The benefits of **backbone support from Thriving Southland** to the community.

The study documents the progress made for those interested in Thriving Southland's work, Catchment Group leaders, the Southland farming community, and external stakeholders such as funders and local government bodies. The study used a mixed method approach, including a survey, administrative data and social media data. For more detail on the data collected and research approach, please see Appendix 1 (page 31).

What we found

Key area 1: Farmers' behaviour change

Introduction

This section describes the **improved outcomes for farmers** from their involvement in Catchment Groups in terms of:

- building capability and motivation to change
- making changes to farming practice.

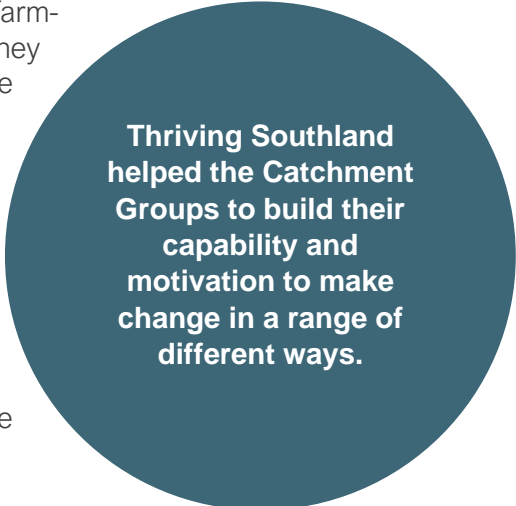
In this section, “respondents” refers to Catchment Group organisers, leaders and key project participants who have experience with Thriving Southland.

In a survey conducted between 2 July and 6 August 2024, 35 respondents rated the extent to which Thriving Southland had helped the members of the Catchment Group (as shown in the graphs below). Respondents also provided key examples of their Catchment Group's progress since its formation or since 2020 (for Catchment Groups formed before then) and identified the most valuable contributions Thriving Southland had made over the past four years.

Building capability and having motivation to change

In order to make change, farmers first need to understand their farm- and catchment-specific challenges and opportunities. Second, they need to understand the whole approach that is required to create a meaningful farm management practice. Third, they need to know how to tackle the options, mitigations and pathways available, both at a farm and catchment scale. Fourth, they need to be aware of the options and support from their peers. This section explains how participating farmers are making progress in these areas.

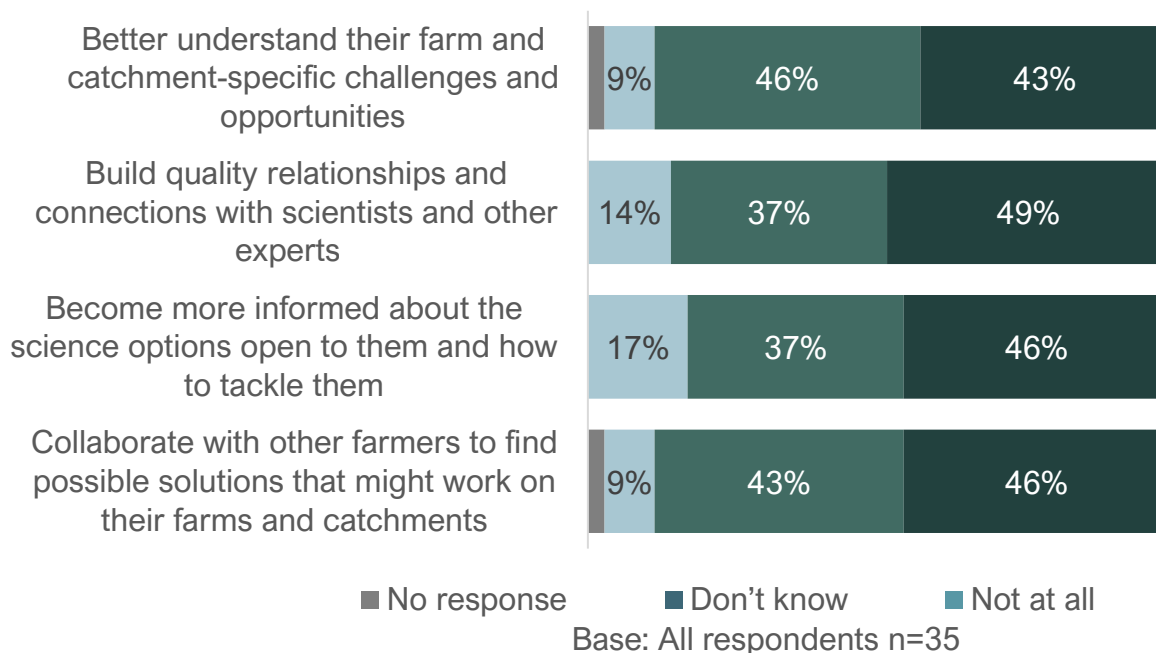
As the following chart shows, most respondents (86% overall)² believed that Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups to build their capability and motivation to make change in a range of different ways. Ratings were strong for all key aspects.



Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups to build their capability and motivation to make change in a range of different ways.

² 86% is the average of respondents who gave a rating of *quite a lot* or *a lot* for all four statements.

Thriving Southland helped Catchment Groups build their capability and motivation to make change in the following ways



Farmers understand farm- and catchment-specific challenges and opportunities

Most respondents (89%) thought that Thriving Southland helped their Catchment Group better understand their farm- and catchment-specific challenges and opportunities *a lot* or *quite a lot*. One of the ways this occurred initially was by supporting Catchment Group meetings and discussions to identify the issues affecting farmers in a catchment area.

... We have had meetings and discussions together around things that affect us all. These discussions probably wouldn't have happened if the group hadn't been formed.

Understanding the catchment-specific challenges involved bringing different members of the catchment together and using science to better understand the challenges.

Farmers understand the whole approach (i.e. that whole horizons matter) required to create and integrate meaningful farm management practices

Thriving Southland recognises that farmers need to build relationships with scientists and other experts in order to trust the science. The science needs to be relevant and actionable for farmers to take ownership and buy into it and know which options could work for them.

Most respondents (89%) agreed *a lot* or *quite a lot* that Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups build quality relationships and connections with scientists and other experts.

Also, many respondents (83%) agreed *a lot* or *quite a lot* that Thriving Southland helped their Catchment Group become more informed about the science options open to them and how to address them.

[Thriving Southland has brokered] connections to other professionals such as [person] for communications, scientists, consultants and professionals we may not have historically connected with. [That they have also connected us] with other likeminded groups has been really critical; especially when designing projects, avoiding double ups of topics and ensuring we are using other learnings to create the best projects.

A variety of projects have been completed and [are] in progress, including wetland creation in conjunction with NIWA scientists.

Farmers know how to tackle the options, mitigations and pathways at both farm and catchment scales

Most respondents (89%) thought that Thriving Southland supported Catchment Groups *a lot* or *quite a lot* to collaborate with other farmers to find possible solutions for their farms and catchments.

[Thriving Southland has helped us in] understanding the catchment challenges through science. [They've helped us in] getting all catchment members on board and involved.

Thriving Southland helped with a wintering system trial. [The trial is] proving that it's management and good planning that can make all the difference. [It's] helped stop stupid blanket rules. Understanding your landscape; great for farmers to know what areas to focus on and the key risks of their farm.

Farmers are aware of options and support from their peers

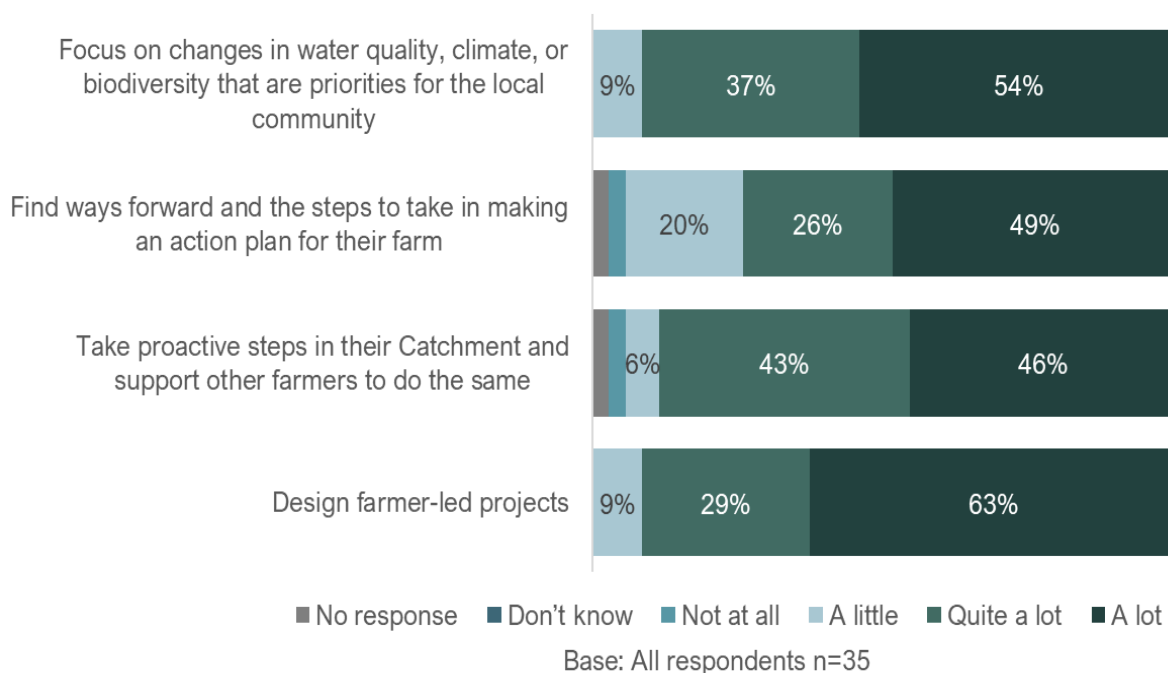
There is clear evidence that farmers are becoming aware of the options available to them. Having peers to work with to make sense of their catchment's data, and having catchment-specific data available to them online were both helpful.

Under the banner of the ACE project, we have had a lot of scientific research come into our catchment and we have been able to make sense of that data. We now have a website loaded with catchment-specific resources that are valuable to the catchment.

Practice change

As the following chart shows, most respondents (86% overall)³ also believed that Thriving Southland helped the Catchment Groups *a lot* or *quite a lot* in supporting farmers to make changes in their practice in a range of different ways.

Thriving Southland helped Catchment Groups make change in the following ways:



Farmers are focusing on changes in water quality, climate and biodiversity

As noted in the chart above, 91% of the respondents thought Thriving Southland had helped Catchment Groups focus on changes in water quality, climate or biodiversity that are priorities for the local community *a lot* or *quite a lot*.

Respondents also provided detailed examples of that focus and the activities undertaken.

Since 2020, we have gone through a large project with Land Water Science to map our whole catchment based on the erosion susceptibility. This ranked the catchment from highest to lowest priority, which has informed farmers where to focus when it comes to installing mitigations. From that project Environment Southland approached the catchment about being a pilot group for the Hill Country Erosion Fund project. Using the science, we identified 5 high ranked areas to install some mitigations into.

As noted already, another Catchment Group undertook a wintering system trial to better understand the aspects of management and planning that were the most important in their

³ 86% is the summary proportion of those respondents giving a rating of *quite a lot* or *a lot* for all four statements.

setting. Many of the older Catchment Groups reported finishing projects. However, the newer groups appreciated how Thriving Southland's involvement sped up the process, guiding them to get focused and start their projects.

[Thriving Southland helped] with the formation of the group, which was about 6 months ago with a committee pulled together in the last 2 months. It's moving very quickly with projects underway and community engagement happening.

Farmers are focusing on change pathways

We were interested to know the extent to which Catchment Groups were identifying a way forward and the steps to take. Three-quarters of respondents said Thriving Southland helped a *lot* or *quite a lot* for the Catchment Groups to find ways forward and identify the steps farmers could take to make an action plan for their farm.

In the first instance, some Catchment Groups offered a range of different events to better determine the areas of particular interest in their catchment.

[The Catchment] Group has facilitated many events and field days of interest to the group and the wider community on topics like wetlands, wintering, composting barns, rules and regulations, Aqua Van, funding for farmers, runoff detainment bunds, seed collecting, plant propagation etc.

From these activities, Catchment Groups supported farmers to focus on areas of interest to them to understand possible change pathways, both for individual farmers and for the catchments more generally.

Conversations have evolved a long way between farmers, and knowledge of water quality challenges and GHG emissions is a lot more advanced.

[We] have an understanding of the science behind the sources and flow pathways and [are] able to put a plan in place as a catchment.

Farmers support other farmers to drive positive change and take proactive steps toward farming for the future

There is clear evidence that Thriving Southland helps farmers support each other to drive positive change and take proactive steps towards farming for the future. Most respondents (89%) believed a *lot* or *quite a lot* that Thriving Southland helps farmers take proactive steps in their catchment and supports other farmers to do the same. Examples of this collaboration included the completion of an integrated Catchment Management Plan and work to support improving water quality and winter grazing on farms.

Have had multiple field days to make farmers aware of their obligations with regard to regulations around water quality and winter grazing. [Thriving Southland] have applied for funding for projects the Catchment Group intends to progress with.

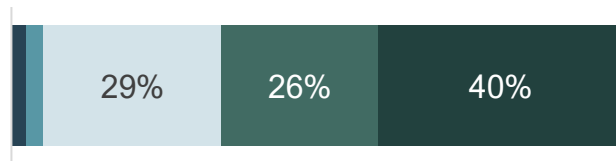
Respondents were in strong agreement (92% a *lot* or *quite a lot*) that Thriving Southland supported the Catchment Groups to design farmer-led projects.

We have had some great success through farmer-led projects thanks to Thriving Southland's support. Raising awareness of an issue with the wider community through farmer-led and presented info has worked really well for our community. Connecting farmers who are having similar issues and concerns and creating projects to find solutions has been the biggest gain for our group.

Stakeholders are committing to co-funding, where people and organisations in the community want to contribute financially and in-kind

There was good buy-in to the Catchment Group projects, and two-thirds of Catchment Group members reported giving time and resources *a lot* or *quite a lot* to further these. The next section (page 16) has more information about the extent of the support provided.

Extent to which Catchment Group members have given time and resources to further their Catchment Group projects



■ No response ■ Don't know ■ Not at all ■ A little ■ Quite a lot ■ A lot

Base: All respondents n=35

Example of backbone support: Agritech event

In May 2024, Thriving Southland successfully organised a major event, the Southland AgriTech and Innovation Day, drawing over 300 attendees. The event offered a diverse lineup of inspirational speakers and hands-on workshops. Participants left feeling energised and informed.

The event, held at the Southern Field Days site in Waimumu and supported by the Gore/Waimumu Catchment Group, prioritised practical workshops, allowing farmers to delve deeply into the costs and benefits of emerging technologies and science, which are particularly pertinent in today's challenging economic climate.

[Thriving Southland] led events such as the Agritech day, have been some of the best, most insightful events we've ever attended. (Farmer)

... This is a real shining light, because it's showing where the opportunities are for farm businesses. (Catchment Group coordinator)



Focused on the latest advancements in farming technology and innovation for the southern farming community, the event offered:

- reflections from the AgriTech New Zealand chief executive
- a panel discussion on genetic modification with leading experts
- a series of “Innovation Stations” – workshops which showcased cutting-edge sustainable practices and emerging technologies.

⋮ *Knowledge is probably the most powerful tool we've got. (Attendee comment)*

Integrating measurement with new technology

The AgriTech New Zealand chief executive complimented farmers attending on already being innovative.

⋮ *[New Zealand farmers] are the All Blacks of farming globally.*

He also encouraged farmers to keep working to be innovative, to measure what they do, and integrate the use of data with new technology.



Genetic modification issues

Thriving Southland attracted leading experts on genetic modification for a panel discussion. Panellists included a researcher in sustainable wellbeing, a leading biotechnologist and geneticist, and a farmer who is a pioneer in biotech.

They advocated for a more informed national dialogue on GM and gene editing, noting the potential for these technologies to tackle agricultural challenges and climate change. They also

suggested that New Zealand farmers adopting GM could coexist alongside those choosing to remain GE-free.



Innovation Stations

Innovation Stations offered farmers the chance to consider and see first-hand a range of new technologies including spray drones, robotic animals, the economics of electrification, soil radiometrics, renewable energy on farm, and innovative new biostimulants and biofertilisers.

Funding from new sources

Thriving Southland generated sponsorship for the event of \$11,300 from 10 sponsors, which supported the venue hire, catering and promotion.

Key area 2: Thriving Southland is an effective backbone organisation

Introduction

Thriving Southland acts as an effective backbone organisation. Backbone organisations are those that “guide vision and strategy, support aligned activities, establish shared measurement practices, build public will, advance policy, and mobilize funding”. (Turner, Merchant, Martin, & Kania, 2012)

The *Change and Innovation Project* funds Thriving Southland to provide vital support to the Catchment Groups as well as funding Catchment Group projects. The original budget allocated by MPI for Thriving Southland was \$6 million between 2020 and 2023. Additional project funding of \$698,000 was leveraged from other sources as well as donations of \$11,250.

For the year ended 31 May 2024, Thriving Southland received an additional \$1.2 million from MPI to continue the *Change and Innovation Project* as well as \$31,300 from grants and sponsorship to fund current activities.

This funding supported the Catchment Groups and their projects, as well as the overall activity of Thriving Southland. Thriving Southland is committed to ensuring that this support effectively benefits the Southland farming community.

Southland farms link to four main river catchments: Maitai, Oreti, Aparima and Waiau, as well as some smaller catchments. Thriving Southland runs the Catchment Groups through five networks, with a paid coordinator supporting each. The large Maitai River catchment is split into Upper and Lower Maitai Catchment Groups.

Scope of activity

A summary of the activities undertaken in the year to 31 May 2024 gives an idea of the scope of Thriving Southland's current involvement. In total, 3,684 participants attended a diverse range of events and activities run by either the Catchment Groups or Thriving Southland. This variety reflects a commitment to engaging with the community in diverse ways.

- **Catchment Groups ran 169 science and learning events and activities**, attracting 1,925 participants. Around 20% of Catchment Group members went to each others' activities.
- **Catchment Groups also ran 64 events with an engagement/social wellbeing focus**, attracting 1,364 participants.
- **Thriving Southland ran five events** attracting 395 participants, including the AGM, Agritech event, and the stakeholder breakfast and Catchment Group Leaders Forum.

Changes since 2021

The following table shows the scale of funding and the numbers of projects undertaken since the programme began in 2020, and the progress by May 2024.

Key scale measures	By May 2021	By May 2024
Number of Catchment Groups supported	Thriving Southland reinvigorated or established 27 Catchment Groups.	There were 37 active Catchment Groups, with one new Catchment Group this year in the Mid and Lower Maitara – Edendale Aquifer
Funding approved	Thriving Southland approved funding of \$818,153 for 28 <i>Change and Innovation Projects</i> to be run by Catchment Groups.	Thriving Southland had approved funding of \$2.5 million for <i>Change and Innovation Projects</i> to be run by Catchment Groups.
Projects undertaken	28 projects started	147 projects started 138 projects completed

One key feature of Thriving Southland is that it is effective in facilitating conversations and brokering relationships. They have also worked consistently to engage with Māori and are making slow but steady progress in this area.

Key strategic observations	By May 2021	By May 2024
Relationships	Building relationships was slow and took time.	Well-established, strong working relationships enable effective collaboration on projects.
Strategic focus	Solid foundation built with good strategic conversations.	Catchment Groups engage on aspects that are important to them.
Engagement with Māori	Engagement with Māori in preliminary stages. Records of meetings with iwi not available.	Thriving Southland met with iwi six times in the year to 31 May 2024 and iwi attended 15 Catchment Group activities.

Thriving Southland provides outreach by using a range of media to communicate with the Catchment Groups and maintain farmer engagement and involvement.

Key media measures	By May 2021	By May 2024
Facebook reach	815 Facebook followers by June 2021. Average engagement for page posts was 6.9 for 6 months to June 2021.	2,610 Facebook followers by June 2024. Facebook reach 56,300 ⁴ .
Website content	Started building the website in 2021.	There is now a comprehensive website containing important science information.
Website traffic	Website use traffic ranged between 1,923 and 2,450 per quarter in 2021.	Website traffic ranged between 2,000 and 9,200 each quarter in 2024. The Agritech event drove the uptake of website views.
Outreach by newsletter	Electronic newsletter to 900 subscribers. Open rate of 39%.	Electronic newsletter to 1,497 subscribers. Open rate of 42% (higher than industry norm of 15% to 25%).

Exploring the level of change apparent in the longer term

Introduction

Literature on effective backbone organisations suggests that they assist those they support in predictable ways. As backbone organisations mature, both they and those they support achieve higher level outcomes compared to the initial stages.

Activity	Short-term outcomes (illustrative)	Intermediate outcomes (illustrative)
<i>Guide vision and strategy</i>	Partners share a common understanding of the need and desired result	Partners' individual work is increasingly aligned with the initiative's common agenda
<i>Support aligned activities</i>	Partners increasingly communicate and coordinate their activities toward common goals	Partners collaboratively develop new approaches to advance the initiative
<i>Establish shared measurement practices</i>	Partners understand the value of sharing data	Partners increasingly use data to adapt and refine their strategies
<i>Build public will</i>	Guide vision and strategy	More community members feel empowered to take action on the issue(s)

⁴ Note there is no longer a measure of Facebook engagement as described in May 2021.

<i>Advance policy</i>	Partners increasingly communicate and coordinate their activities toward common goals	Policy changes increasingly occur in line with initiative goals
<i>Mobilize funding</i>	Funding is secured to support initiative activities	Philanthropic and public funds are increasingly aligned with initiative goals

Source: Turner, Merchant, Kania, & Martin, (2012).

Based on feedback from respondents over the four years, Thriving Southland has improved its capacity to deliver impact. By 2024, Thriving Southland frequently achieves what could be classified “intermediate outcomes” rather than merely short-term outcomes, as discussed in the work of Turner et al. above.

This year’s study aimed to measure the changes that respondents attributed to the support of Thriving Southland in the following key areas:

- **guiding** Catchment Groups to develop their **vision and strategy**
- **supporting aligned activities** by helping Catchment Groups collaborate on community priorities
- **establishing shared measurement practices** using science and data to adapt and refine their projects
- **building public will** by helping Catchment groups plan for on-farm challenges and opportunities
- **advancing policy** by supporting Catchment Groups to make changes on-farm based on the science options available to them
- **mobilising funding** by attracting additional investment both in donations and in-kind.

To assess whether Thriving Southland’s work aligns with findings in the literature, we gathered feedback from Catchment Group leaders, organisers and participants (the respondents) regarding the support provided by Thriving Southland and its impact on their Catchment Groups.

Profile of respondents

Most respondents had had a long and highly involved relationship with Thriving Southland, enabling them to judge the effectiveness of its support.

Role in Catchment Group

Most respondents were organisers of a Catchment Group (83%), giving them visibility into the support Thriving Southland provided.

Role in Catchment Group	n=	%
One of the organisers of the Catchment Group	29	83%
Someone who has led a project	6	17%
Someone who has participated in a project	8	23%
Total	43	123%

Respondents had on average 1.23 roles each

Year first became involved with Catchment Group

Two-thirds of respondents were involved with their Catchment Group before Thriving Southland began providing support, while most (four in five) had participated since at least 2021. This well-positioned many respondents to observe the changes over time. As well, the respondents with experience since 2021 onwards had insights into ways that Thriving Southland helped their Catchment Groups establish quickly.

The year respondents first became involved with their Catchment Group.	n=	%
Before Thriving Southland became involved	15	43%
2020	9	26%
2021	5	14%
2022	3	9%
2024	3	9%
Total	35	100%

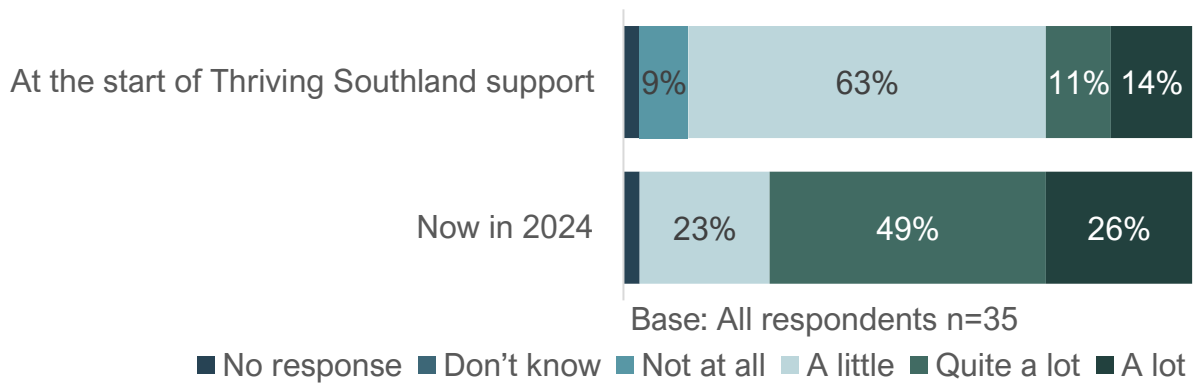
Our question to respondents was:

We are interested in what has or hasn't changed in the Catchment Group after receiving support from Thriving Southland. Here we ask you some "at the start" and "now" questions. Please think back to when you were first involved with the Catchment Group for the "at the start" questions.

Guiding Catchment Groups to develop a vision and strategy

At the start of receiving support from Thriving Southland, just a quarter of respondents (25%) believed their Catchment Group could already shape their own vision and strategy *quite a lot* or *a lot*. However, by 2024 three-quarters (75%) reported this.

Catchment Group is more able to shape their own vision and priorities



Qualitative feedback makes clear that Thuring Southland was instrumental in the Catchment Groups shaping their own vision and priorities:

⋮ *[Thuring Southland] supported the formation of the group and led the initial meetings with direction and a platform for us to find our vision and values.*

⋮ *[Thuring Southland] provided support and coordination with personal help and resources. Essential and very much appreciated.*

A respondent who remembers what it was like before they had Thuring Southland's support reflected:

⋮ *I don't believe our Catchment Group would keep moving forward [without Thuring Southland's support]. We don't have all the landowners or farmers coming to meetings now.... If we went back to being farmer led with Environment Southland helping us out, as we were before, we would struggle to get projects off the ground.*

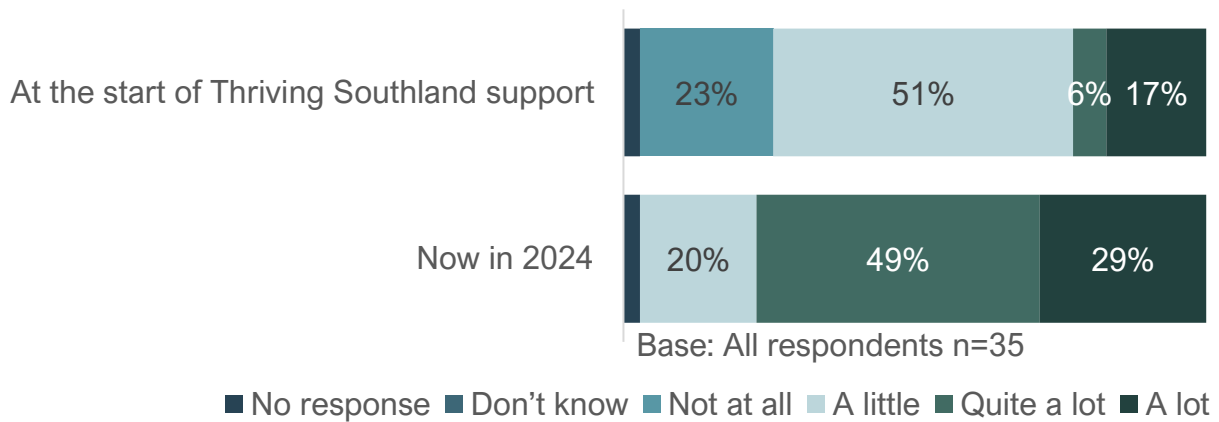
And a respondent from a new Catchment Group reflected:

⋮ *At this stage the group would have the potential to not continue as we are in the early stages and value the support of Thuring Southland to ensure we keep gaining momentum.*

Supporting Catchment Groups to align community priorities

Initially, only some respondents (23%) believed that Catchment Groups could collaborate to develop new ways to advance community priorities. However, by 2024 nearly four in five (78%) of respondents indicated the Catchment Groups benefited from Thuring Southland's support *quite a lot* or *a lot*, enabling them to collaborate to develop new ways to advance community priorities.

Catchment Group is more able to collaboratively develop new ways to advance community priorities



Respondents commented that Thriving Southland's support of Catchment Groups helped them be more able to collaborate to develop new ways to advance community priorities both locally and regionally.

Administrative and coordinator's support has been massive. We are able to achieve a lot more as a group of volunteers thanks to the TS [Thriving Southland] team. [Thriving Southland has brokered] connections to other professionals such as [person] for communications, scientists, consultants and professionals we may not have historically connected with. [That they have also connected us] with other likeminded groups has been really critical; especially when designing projects, avoiding double ups of topics and ensuring we are using other learnings to create the best projects.

- Locally, by keeping groups focused, and helping maintain momentum, and inducting new committee members:

The ongoing support of [the facilitator] is invaluable as she helps to keep us focused on progress and is a crucial link to ideas, resources and knowledge that we otherwise would struggle to have on our own.

[Thriving Southland has] helped a new committee find their feet as [other] members have left.

- Regionally, by making links between the Catchment Groups:

The structure of the unity that combines all of the Southland Catchment Groups. Without [Thriving Southland] individual groups would flounder and eventually lose interest.

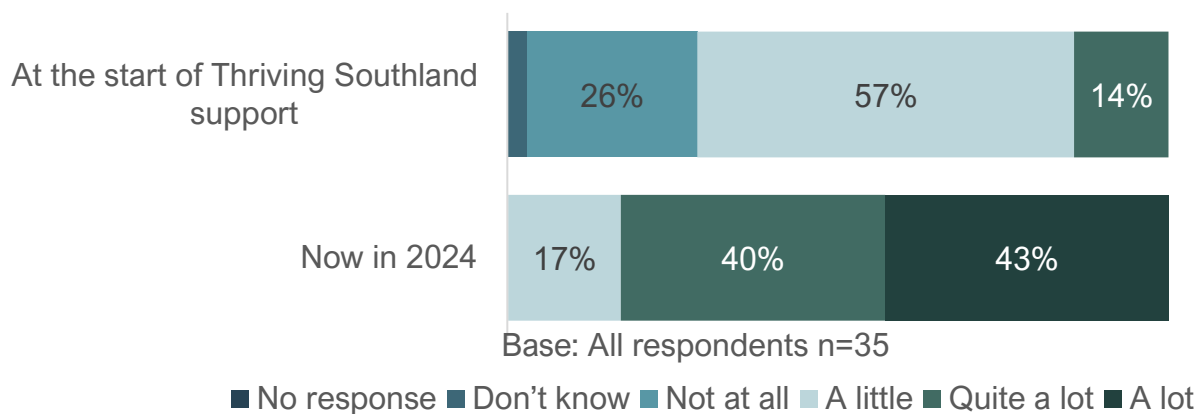
Respondents appreciated being able to choose the project priorities for their catchment, ensuring they were most relevant to them.

We have had some great success through farmer-led projects thanks to [Thriving Southland's] support. Raising awareness of an issue with the wider community through farmer-led and presented info has worked really well for our community.

Helping establish shared measurement practices

Very few respondents (14%) initially thought the Catchment Groups had shared measurement practices such as using science and data. By 2024, however, over four in five (83%) of respondents said the Catchment Groups benefited considerably from Thriving Southland's support in helping them be more able to use science and data to adapt and refine their projects.

Catchment Group is much more able to use science and data to adapt and refine their projects



Respondents credited the Catchment Group coordinators with helping them access science and use it well.

Connecting farmers who are having similar issues and concerns and creating projects to find solutions has been the biggest gain for our group.

Respondents valued the range of science they were able to access through Thriving Southland.

[Thriving Southland helped with] water quality testing, winter grazing advice, help with farm environment plans, future farming workstreams, freshwater farm planning assistance.

Some respondents appreciated support to get projects started and use the science to look for opportunities.

Getting our large project started which have given us all the science to now look at mitigation funding opportunities.

Thriving Southland was also credited with helping groups maintain momentum to use the science.

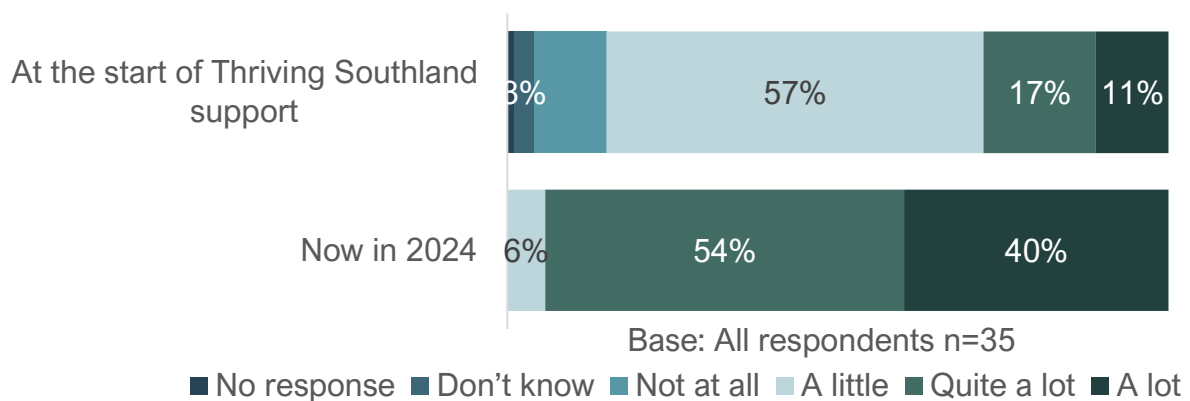
The work by our Catchment Coordinators means we are still going and have access to ideas and science. Helped give us direction.

I think that without Thriving Southland, our Catchment Group – and many others in Southland – would struggle to maintain momentum and relevance. Their support and guidance is crucial to what we do.

Helping build public will, planning for on-farm challenges and opportunities

Initially, few respondents (28%) reported the Catchment Groups could plan for on-farm challenges and opportunities. By 2024, almost all respondents (94%) said the Catchment Groups benefited from Thriving Southland’s support enabling them to plan for on-farm challenges. This signals important science mastery and a notable improvement in the Catchment Groups’ planning abilities, attributed to support from Thriving Southland.

Catchment Group is much more able to plan for on-farm and catchment-specific challenges and opportunities



The group is currently working on a project using spatial data to create a mapping tool on the best locations for freshwater mitigations for landowners, including looking at the best places for wetland development, runoff detainment bunds, critical source areas, overland flow pathways and sediment traps. It is hoped this tool will be widely used by landowners for applications such as freshwater farm planning and winter grazing plans. The ultimate goal for the group is to encourage more wetland development.

Respondents’ comments showed evidence of planning and identifying opportunities on their farms or across their catchments. Some groups had completed larger scale catchment projects which supported planning.

We have just completed an Integrated Catchment Management Plan. We would never have got it finished without [Coordinator] from Thriving Southland

Some recognised the coordination role of Thriving Southland in identifying opportunities and working together to take advantage of them, and reflected that without this support it would be more difficult to work together on the challenges and opportunities.

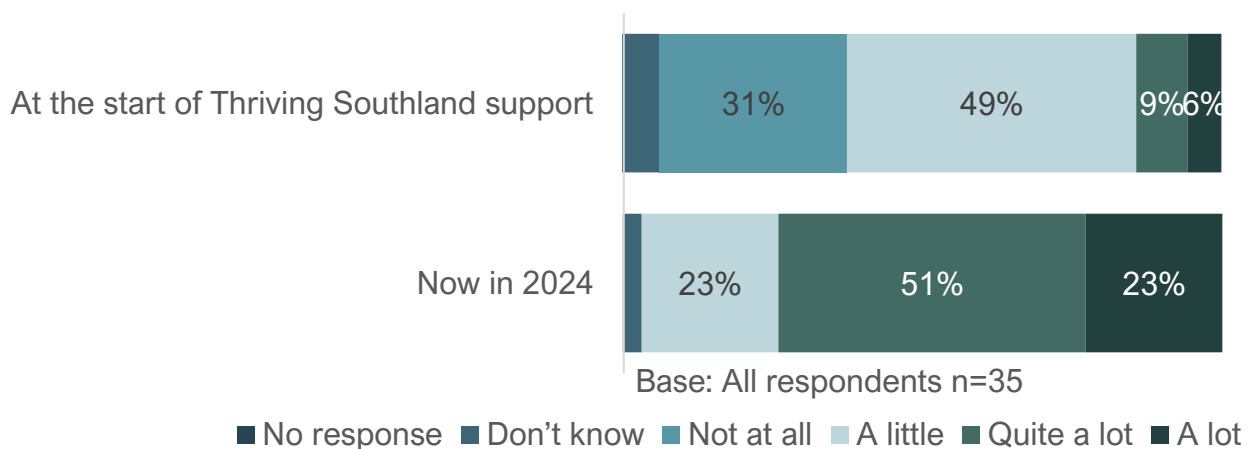
[Without Thriving Southland's support we would lose] the ability to use the scale of the catchment model in Southland to eliminate repetition of projects.

[Thriving Southland provides] cohesion within the region's groups. [Without Thriving Southland it] would put a lot of pressure back on to volunteer chair and secretary type roles within our group.

Helping advance policy by supporting changes on-farm based on the science

While planning is important, taking action is critical. Respondents indicated that with Thriving Southland's help, their Catchment Groups were more able to act and to make changes. Initially, very few respondents (15%) reported that their Catchment Groups were able to act and make changes on-farm, based on the science options open to them. By 2024, however, nearly three-quarters (74%) indicated their Catchment Group had improved capability in this area.

Catchment Group is more able to act, making changes on-farm based on the science options available to them



Respondents valued having different ways to collaborate with others to work on community priorities.

Having a dedicated support person for the group has meant we have been able to avoid fatigue of our volunteer members. When an idea has been mooted within our group, we have had access to support and guidance from throughout the wider catchment (Thriving Southland network as well as other catchment groups). Our coordinator gave the push and enthusiasm to enter the environmental awards.

Since 2020 we have gone through a large project with Land Water Science to map our whole catchment based on the erosion susceptibility. This ranked the catchment from

highest to lowest priority, which has informed farmers where to focus when it comes to installing mitigations. From that project Environment Southland approached the catchment about being a pilot group for the Hill Country Erosion Fund project. Using the science, we identified 5 high ranked areas to install some mitigations into.

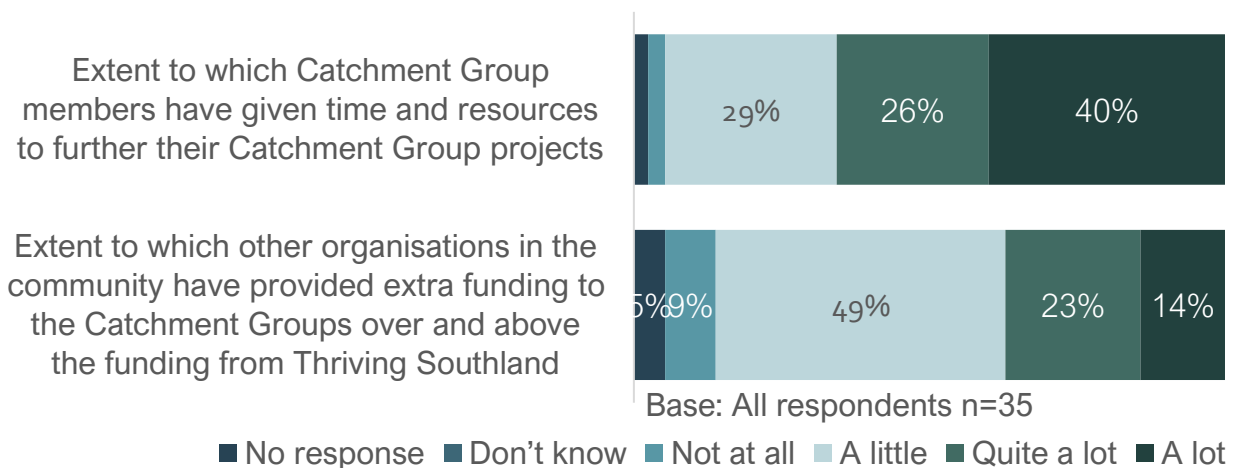
Attracting funding and resources in-kind

Thriving Southland monitors both the in-kind funding and actual funding received, reporting this to MPI each year. As shown in the following table, Thriving Southland is starting to attract additional funding, although this is still in the early stages. Notably there is substantial in-kind farmer and stakeholder funding, reflecting strong community support for the activities.

Funding contributions in year to 31 May 2024	Funding stream	As a portion of MPI funding
MPI funding	\$1,200,000	
Other funding	\$31,300	3%
Farmer and stakeholder funding in-kind	\$172,974	14%

Many respondents (66%) reported that Catchment Group members have contributed time and resources. Additionally, over a third of respondents (37%) observed that other organisations in the community are providing extra funding to the Catchment Groups beyond what is allocated to Thriving Southland.

Extent to which Thriving Southland has attracted funding and resources in-kind



Respondents could give clear examples of co-funding and contributions in-kind.

The Catchment Group is supported by a local business to use their nursery facilities for free. The Catchment Group holds open evenings and working bees to propagate native plants from seed. When plants are big enough, they are donated to local community or school groups or are sold at \$1.00 a plant to private landowners. All money received for

plants goes back into potting mix and pots to propagate more plants. The group were donated 1,000 plants to kick things off by a local business and then received \$10,000 funding from Westpac water care fund to continue the project the following year. This has meant that the group have given out over 4,000 plants over the last 3 years and propagated over 3,000 themselves. The goal is to become self-sustainable in the future and not have to rely on funding. Projects have ranged from school planting projects, wetland planting, sediment trap planting and fencing off riparian strips and planting.

The funding saw close to 600 poplar poles and 800 native plants planted over the 5 sites, and also the construction of a wetland. The funding system worked out to be 66% funded through MPI & Environment Southland and 33% farmer funded (cash & in-kind time).

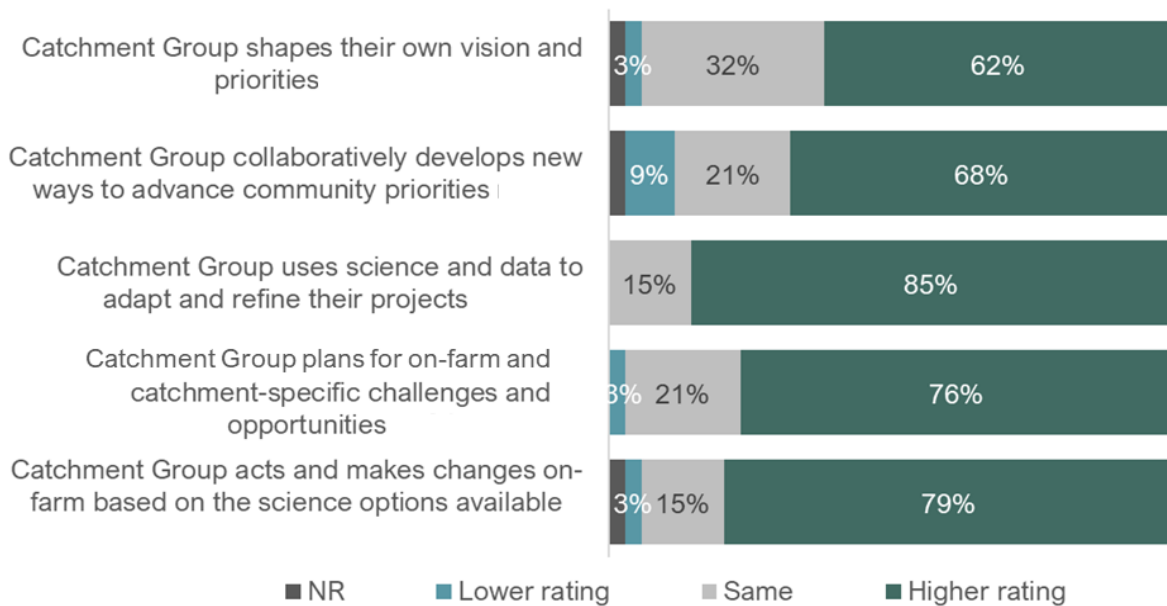
An additional outcome of outreach into the wider community is greater engagement between the farmers and projects in the local urban centres as noted earlier in the report.

Shifts reported are meaningful in a statistical sense

Compared to the beginning of their involvement with the Catchment Group, most respondents noted positive changes across key aspects after receiving help from Thriving Southland. The changes illustrated in the following charts are all statistically significant, clearly demonstrating a strong foundation for confidence in the effectiveness of Thriving Southland’s work.

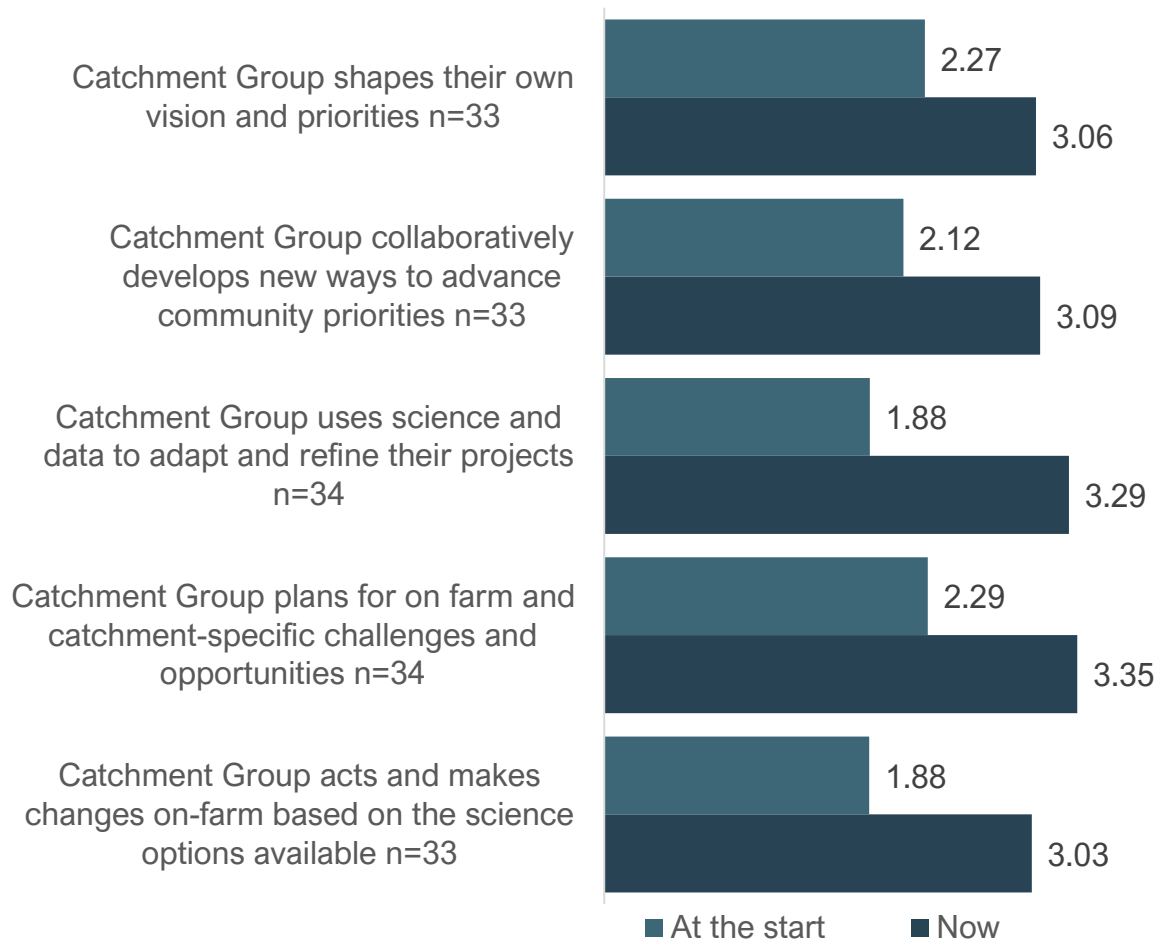
Overall, more than two-thirds of respondents provided higher ratings across all key aspects. The biggest shift (85%) was for *Catchment Groups using science and data to adapt and refine their projects*.

Most of the Catchment Group representatives surveyed said that after receiving Thriving Southland's help their group was better able to do the following activities.



The following chart displays the mean scores for a range of ratings from 1 to 4⁵, comparing responses “at the start” and “now” after respondents participated in the Catchment Groups. It is clear that group organisers, leaders and participants provided more positive ratings on all aspects after receiving support from Thriving Southland.

Mean scores comparing ratings "at the start" with "now" after receiving support from Thriving Southland....

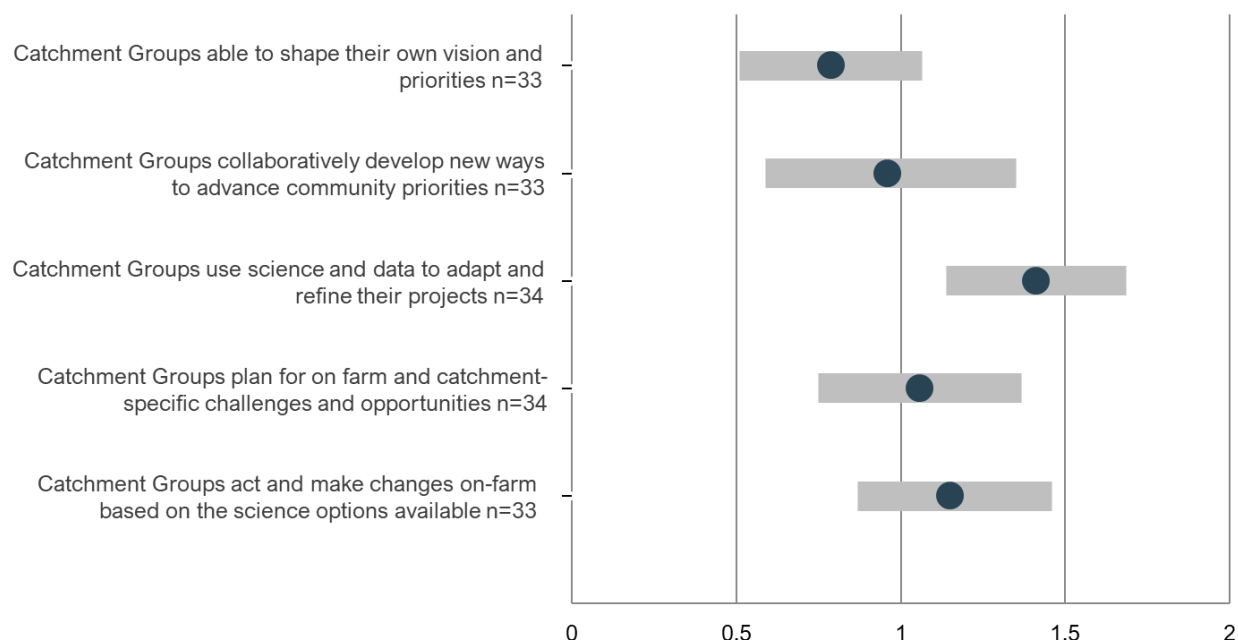


We also assessed whether the observed changes were statistically meaningful by calculating the mean score shift between the “at the start” and “now” measures, along with the confidence intervals (see chart on the next page). For a result to be considered meaningful, the blue dots representing the means and the grey bars indicating the confidence intervals must be above zero.

The chart clearly shows that all statements reflect meaningful changes between the “at the start” and “now” measures from leaders, organisers and participants who received support from Thriving Southland for their Catchment Group.

⁵ The mean scores from survey ratings were: Not at all =1, A little = 2, Quite a lot = 3 and A lot = 4. Bases do not include those who did not give a response, so are lower than for rating scales.

Mean score and confidence intervals of the change between “at the start” and “now” after receiving support from Thriving Southland



Conclusion

Overall, there is unmistakable evidence from a range of sources that Thriving Southland is an **effective backbone organisation** that:

- works as a catalyst for achieving community-led progress, and supports building a shared understanding of farmers’ issues in different catchments and possible mitigation actions
- supports sharing scientific information within and between Catchment Groups to inform farmer choices
- provides continuous communication that helps build community trust, supports work towards mutual objectives and amplifies common motivations.

However, based on the feedback from Catchment Group organisers and leaders, the momentum gained requires ongoing coordination from an organisation such as Thriving Southland. Making the connections between groups and facilitating meetings, particularly where farmers are trying to set their vision and strategy, help the groups make links with science and amplify the common motivations. Without this ongoing support the gains made by the Catchment Groups to date are likely to be considerably slowed or potentially lost.

Appendix 1: Research method

Introduction

Thriving Southland commissioned Pragmatica Limited to show some of the key progress and benefits experienced by the Catchment Groups since the start of the project.

Research method

For the fourth year, Thriving Southland commissioned a study from Pragmatica Limited. **This year's study shows some of the more recent progress and longer-term benefits** experienced by the Catchment Groups funded through the *Change and Innovation Project*.

This mixed method research is designed to show how well Thriving Southland provided support to Catchment Groups to help achieve improved outcomes to farmers in terms of building capability and motivation to change as well as practical changes to farming practice

Data used

Pragmatica developed the study from surveys, administrative data and social media content.

- A survey of Catchment Group leaders, organisers and participants was conducted between 2 July and 6 August 2024. The project team at Thriving Southland developed a sample of 88 people from all the Catchment Groups who either had a leadership role in a Catchment Group or were heavily involved in a Catchment Group project. The rationale for this selection is that these people understood the input Thriving Southland had provided and also could see the impact the projects had on their community.

Of the 88 possible respondents, **78 opened the email**, 38 clicked through and 35 completed the survey after up to five reminders, **giving a response rate of 45%**.
- We used administrative data gathered by Thriving Southland from Catchment Group projects and events for the year to 31 May 2024.
- Individual Catchment Group project reports and social media communications were assessed for the year to 31 May 2024.
- We also analysed Thriving Southland and Catchment Groups' social media activity during the period.
- For the comparative data at the start of the project we drew on the *Evaluation of Thriving Southland: Change and Innovation Project* (Oakden & Spee, 2021), which reported data for the first period of operation March 2020 to May 2021.

Catchment groups represented

The profile of survey respondents shows that each of the Catchment Group areas was well represented.

<i>Catchment Group area</i>		<i>Catchment Group</i>	<i>Responses n=</i>
<i>Te Anau and Aparima</i>	8	Lower Aparima Catchment Group	3
		Mid Aparima Catchment Group	1
		Orepuki Catchment Group	1
		Pourakino Catchment Group	3
<i>Mid and Lower Maitai</i>	9	Edendale Aquifer Group	2
		Gore/Waimumu Catchment Group	2
		Lower Maitai Catchment Group	1
		South Coast Catchment Group	1
		Waikaka Stream Catchment Group	2
		Waikawa Catchment Group	1
<i>Lower and Mid Oreti</i>	9	Greater Dipton Catchment Group	1
		Hedgehope Makarewa Catchment Group	3
		Lower Oreti Catchment Group	1
		Makarewa Headwaters Catchment Group	2
		Mid Oreti Catchment Group	1
		Waihopai Catchment Group	1
<i>Upper Maitai</i>	5	Balfour Catchment Group	2
		Otamita Catchment Group	2
		Waikaia Catchment Group	1
<i>Waiau and Upper Oreti</i>	4	Between the Domes Catchment Group	3
		Orauea River Catchment Group	1
		Total	35

Analysis

Data from the survey and the administrative data was analysed in Excel. Key themes were extracted from the survey verbatim comments. We used a synthesis process to draw the different strands of data together and map them against the emerging themes.

The retrospective pre post test data was analysed using confidence intervals, which combine information on location and precision, rather than null hypothesis statistics testing (Cumming & Calin-Jageman, 2016). The analysis and reporting of the confidence intervals were statistically reviewed by a colleague.

We then had discussions with the project team regarding findings, validating and contextualising the conclusions. This process helped ensure any recommendations offered are aligned with Thriving Southland policy direction and practical to implement.

Limitations

This is a small, targeted study focusing on Thriving Southland's support of Catchment Groups and what Catchment Groups have achieved in supporting farmers. The study does not cover other areas of the *Change and Innovation Project*, such as Thriving Southland's governance or project management functions.

Appendix 2: Logic model



References

Cumming, G., & Calin-Jageman, R. (2016). *Introduction to the New Statistics: Estimation, open science and beyond* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Oakden, J., & Spee, K. (2021). *Evaluation of Thriving Southland: Change and Innovation Project*. Wellington, New Zealand: Pragmatica.

Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., & Martin, E. (2012). Understanding the value of backbone organizations in collective impact. Part 1. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.48558/X3KJ-BS10>

Turner, S., Merchant, K., Martin, E., & Kania, J. (2012). Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact: Part 2. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.48558/HHX0-0V21>

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