NEXT WAVE

A BAROMETER OF SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION
IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND 2026

PRESENTED BY

Sustainable Business Network

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

UC UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Contents

MUSHROOM MATERIAL

Foreword

Aotearoa New Zealand doesn't lack good ideas. It never has. This report shows there's a remarkable cohort of businesses that go beyond brilliant thinking. They're putting ideas into practice – building solutions, proving models and pointing the way towards a more regenerative, circular economy.

The Next Wave Report 2026, produced by the Sustainable Business Network in partnership with the University of Canterbury, provides longitudinal data about how these innovators are doing, now for the second year running. What it shows is both inspiring and sobering. Confidence is high. Ambition is growing. And yet too many of these businesses are stuck at the same critical juncture – not for lack of vision, but for lack of the right conditions to scale.

The context for this work has never been more urgent. Aotearoa New Zealand is already living with the consequences of an extractive economy. More frequent and severe weather events. Degraded waterways. Biodiversity in decline. Community resilience under constant strain. The costs are here and will continue to arrive due to the decades of taking more than we give back. The science is clear: the single most important thing we can do is accelerate, and invest in, the shift away from systems that extract and deplete, towards ones that restore and regenerate.

That means moving faster on renewable energy and building the grid to support it. Rethinking how we grow and distribute food through practices that rebuild soil and ecosystems. Eliminating harmful products and packaging wherever possible, and ensuring what remains is designed for reuse and to restore, not harm, the natural world. Electrifying our transport and reimagining how people and goods move. Designing buildings and communities that work with nature, not against it. And genuinely providing good employment and wages.

None of this is hypothetical. Businesses in this report are already doing these things. The question is whether our financial systems, our procurement decisions, our policy settings and our collective will can align fast enough to help them succeed at scale. Aotearoa New Zealand can and should be leading on this for a world that needs these solutions.

The barriers aren't mysterious. Our financial systems, and many political and business leaders, still focus on short-term profits over the much-needed longer sustainable business and innovation timelines. The aligned people and communities, who are genuinely receptive to the solutions, are not yet active in the scale needed to create change in the marketplace. Policy settings are increasingly unstable. These are all solvable problems, but only if the right people decide to solve them.

That's where all of us come in. Investors, corporates, councils, business support providers, you and me. We get to create the infrastructure around these sustainable innovators, which is just as important as the innovation itself. Connecting these local sustainable businesses to flexible capital structures, to the right networks, to customers ready to make the switch: that is the work of today. The transition from extractive to regenerative isn't a distant goal. It's already underway, led by the amazing committed visionaries running the businesses in this report. They just need us – all of the players in this aligned ecosystem – to link arms and catch up.

The Next list comprises finalists in the Sustainable Business Awards. They show up year after year with purpose and persistence and we're proud to stand alongside them.

Ngā mihi nui to the SBN team who make this work possible, and to our colleagues at the University of Canterbury whose rigour and commitment have made this barometer a genuinely useful tool.

Read this report. Share it. And then ask yourself: what's my role in helping these businesses succeed?

RACHEL BROWN ONZM, FOUNDER & CEO, SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS NETWORK

Executive summary

A survey of sustainable innovators in Aotearoa New Zealand reveals that while two thirds are confident about their growth prospects, they lack the capital and conditions to scale.

OPTIMISM IS HIGH BUT FINANCIAL OUTCOMES ARE MIXED

67% of the 42 businesses surveyed are confident in their growth prospects. Yet their financial results are mixed. While the proportion reaching break-even has risen substantially (from 17% in 2024 to 31% in 2025), the share achieving high profit margins (above 20%) has declined (from 17% to 3%).

Access to funding remains a persistent challenge. Half of respondents (50%) describe it as difficult, a similar proportion to last year (54%). The most common barriers are: short investment horizons that don't fit sustainability timelines; lack of collateral or security; and funders' limited familiarity with sustainability-driven business models.

When funding is secured, more than three quarters (78%) of companies say their investors value their sustainability mission.

MARKET DEMAND IS GROWING BUT MAINSTREAM AWARENESS HAS DECLINED

Demand has strengthened slightly for these innovators. 60% report moderate or significant growth in 2025, up from 52% the year before. In contrast, customer awareness has dipped: the proportion citing high awareness dropped from 31% to 14%.

This suggests growth is being driven by engaged, values-driven customers rather than the wider market. Mainstream market penetration remains limited.

POLICY IS NOT YET CREATING STRONG COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY

Almost half of respondents (45%) view the policy and regulatory environment as unsupportive. Only 18% view it as supportive, a small improvement on last year's 11%. Stability and predictability remain ongoing concerns.

WHAT WOULD ACCELERATE IMPACT MOST

Respondents identified four key drivers:

- access to funding and investment
- supportive regulations and policy
- growing consumer demand and awareness
- strengthening internal capabilities and external partnerships

The trends they expect to shape innovation over the next five years are: artificial intelligence (AI), circular innovations, energy transitions and shifting consumer expectations for greater authenticity.

FOUR OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCELERATE SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

1. Unlock fit-for-purpose, long-horizon finance to enable sustainable growth

2. Create a stable, enabling policy environment that gives innovators confidence

3. Expand customer access, awareness and education to build mainstream demand

4. Strengthen capability, infrastructure and partnerships to support scaling

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Next Wave report examines Aotearoa New Zealand's emerging sustainable innovators – the next wave of purpose-driven businesses. The findings are based on a survey of 42 businesses that were among the finalists in the 2025 Sustainable Business Awards, selected for disruptive innovation. Now in its second year, the report is an annual barometer of sentiment and performance.

LIVING HOUSE

Purpose and objectives

This report examines Aotearoa New Zealand's emerging sustainable innovators – the next wave of purpose-driven businesses. The findings are based on a survey of finalists in the 2025 Sustainable Business Awards, a group named 'Next'. They were selected for disruptive innovation or transformational leadership.

The report provides a barometer of sentiment across a sector defined by purpose, ambition and emerging impact. It explores how these innovators perceive their operating environment, what's helping or hindering their growth, and what's needed to scale their impact.

The report is aimed at those who shape how innovative businesses grow – from investors and business support providers to corporate leaders, system enablers and policymakers. It offers essential insights into a new wave of businesses creating low-emissions technologies, circular economy solutions, regenerative practices and socially inclusive business models. These ventures are not only solving critical challenges but also laying the foundation for a more resilient, prosperous future.

MOHOAO SEED

ORBA SHOES

Methodology

The insights in this annual barometer report are based on survey data collected online between October and December 2025 from organisations on the Next list (finalists in the 2025 Sustainable Business Awards). The Awards comprised two categories – Disruptive Innovation and Transformational Leadership. For the purposes of the report, the survey focused on organisations in the former category.

The Next Wave is a longitudinal study, and the results from 2025 are compared with insights from the 2024 Next Wave report. Results for 2025 draw on a sample of 42. Year-on-year shifts should be read as directional rather than definitive.

Sustainable innovation landscape

This section provides an overview of who took part in the Next Wave survey, presenting respondent characteristics by sector, organisation size and revenue.

THE SUSTAINABLE ECOSYSTEM OPERATES ACROSS A BROAD MIX OF SECTORS

Respondents in this survey represent a diverse cross-section of sustainable innovation activity, with the largest concentrations in the Built Environment (27%) and Manufacturing (24%), followed by Primary Industries (10%) and Accommodation & Food Services (10%). Retail (7%) and Transport (5%) feature as smaller but meaningful segments, alongside Energy (5%) and a spread of other categories.

The most notable change to the 2024 sample profile was the increase in Built Environment representation, rising from 9% to 27% in 2025.

SMALL ENTERPRISES CONTINUE TO DOMINATE

The findings suggest the sustainable innovation landscape remains heavily weighted towards smaller organisations. In 2025, nearly half of respondents (48%) reported 1–5 employees, up from 41% in 2024. The 6–20 employee group declined from 36% to 28%, and 21–50 employees fell from 18% to 10%. At the larger end, there is a modest lift: 100+ employee organisations increased from 2% (2024) to 10% (2025).

The 2025 sample indicates small innovators alongside a growing presence of larger organisations, while mid-sized innovators are less represented this year.

Figure 1: Number of employees in sustainable innovation organisations

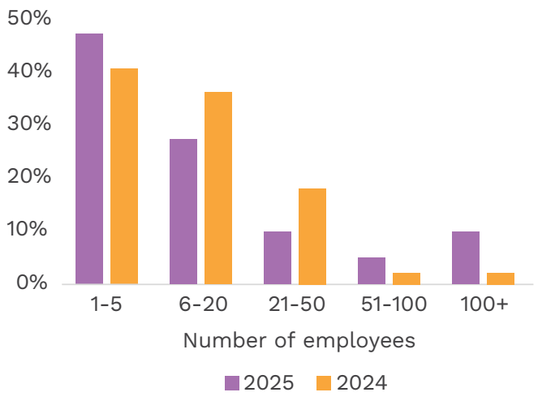
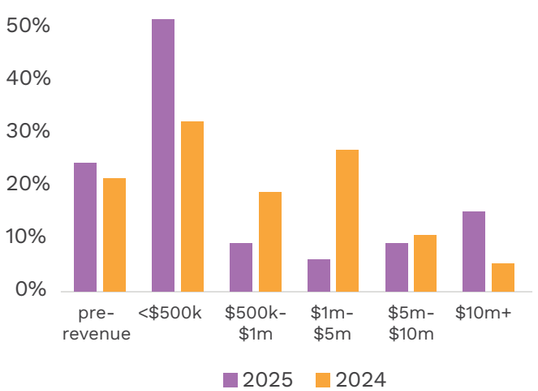


Figure 2: Annual revenue profiles across sustainable innovators



MORE EARLY-STAGE FIRMS AND HIGH-REVENUE FIRMS; FEWER IN THE MIDDLE

The 2025 revenue profile reinforces the sustainable innovation sector's early-stage character while also showing a small cohort of organisations achieving strong commercial scale.

- Under $500k revenue is the largest group in 2025 at 45%, up from 28% in 2024.
- Pre-revenue organisations are also slightly higher at 21% (compared to 19% in 2024).

At the same time, the top end is growing: $10m+ revenue has increased from 5% (2024) to 13% (2025), while the middle bands have shrunk markedly:

- $1m–$5m has dropped from 23% to 5%
- $500k–$1m has dropped from 16% to 8%
- $5m–$10m is broadly similar.

The 2025 cohort shows a polarised distribution, with a larger share of organisations at early revenue stages, alongside a smaller set of high revenue organisations. Fewer respondents sit in the middle.

WHAT THE RESULTS TELL US

Taken together, the sample profile is:

- Broadly distributed across sectors, with especially strong representation in Built Environment, an area where policy, procurement and standards can significantly influence market demand.
- Dominated by small enterprises.
- Commercially split, with many organisations still early-stage (pre-revenue or sub-$500k), while a smaller group is reaching $10m+.


STRAWSIPS

Business performance and growth

This section identifies year-on-year changes in business performance and growth sentiment among survey samples. The findings suggest confidence is strengthening, while revenue outcomes are mixed and growth ambitions are rising.

REVENUE IS STABLE

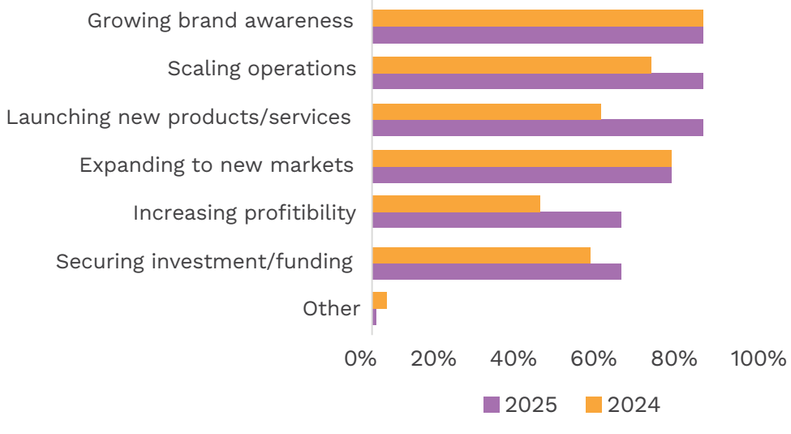
The percentage of organisations reporting stable revenue remained the same in 2025 compared to 2024 at 43%. However, performance appears to be more uneven at the top and bottom ends:

- Organisations reporting strong revenue growth (>20%) increased to 30% of the sample in 2025, up from 24% in 2024.
- Organisations reporting moderate growth (up to 20%) fell overall (13% in 2025 compared to 21% in 2024).
- Organisations reporting revenue decline increased slightly: 15% in 2025, compared with 12% in 2024.

OPTIMISM REMAINS HIGH

Growth confidence remained strong in 2025, with 67% reporting high levels of confidence (66% in 2024). These confidence ratings indicate the businesses surveyed are mostly positive about their future growth prospects, even as financial performance remains uneven.

Figure 3: Growth opportunities for sustainable innovation organisations



GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES: STRONGER FOCUS ON PRODUCT INNOVATION, SCALING AND PROFITABILITY

The survey findings suggest sustained ambition, with several priorities strengthening in 2025:

- Launching new products/services jumped to 79% of the sample in 2025 (up from 55% in 2024), indicating a much stronger innovation and pipeline focus.
- Scaling operations rose to 79% (from 67%), consistent with more organisations moving beyond early validation into delivery and expansion phases.
- Increasing profitability climbed to 60% (from 41%), signalling improving financial sustainability.
- Securing investment/funding increased modestly to 60% (from 52%).

Overall, 2025 respondents indicate stronger intent to build and launch new products or services, scale delivery and improve profitability, while maintaining the long-running emphasis on market expansion and brand visibility.

WHAT THE SECTOR'S PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH PROFILE TELLS US

Growth in 2025 was evident but uneven, with a rising share of organisations achieving more than 20% revenue growth alongside a small increase in those experiencing decline. This distribution signals widening separation between organisations that are successfully scaling and those facing tougher conditions. Confidence, however, continues to outpace performance, with the sector reporting stronger growth expectations despite mixed financial results, likely supported by promising product pipelines, new development activity and belief in positive market direction.

Barriers and challenges

In 2025, the most acute pressures facing the sustainable innovators in this survey centred on growth and commercialisation. Particular pressures included building customer demand, securing finance, scaling operations and achieving profitability. While several operational challenges, such as talent and supply-chain constraints, eased slightly year-on-year, core commercial pressures intensified.

> “It's a very hard space to be in right now, as culturally, Kiwis tend not to adopt new things readily, the government is not supporting environmental initiatives, and businesses are tightening their belts.”

The top challenges highlighted (rated 4 or 5 out of 5, where 5 is a critical challenge) were: building customer demand and awareness (52%, up from 48% in 2024), securing funding or investment (51%, slightly down from 53%), scaling production or operations (50%, up sharply from 37%) and achieving profitability (46%, up from 40%).

Alongside these primary pressures, organisations continued to experience persistent but lower-severity challenges, including navigating regulatory barriers (24%), managing supply-chain constraints (20%) and finding and retaining skilled staff (19%). Taken together, the 2025 results indicate that “scaling and selling” has become a critical inflection point for many organisations, with scaling capacity and customer acquisition emerging as increasingly urgent priorities as more ventures move into growth stages.

Figure 4: Challenges facing sustainable innovators: 2025

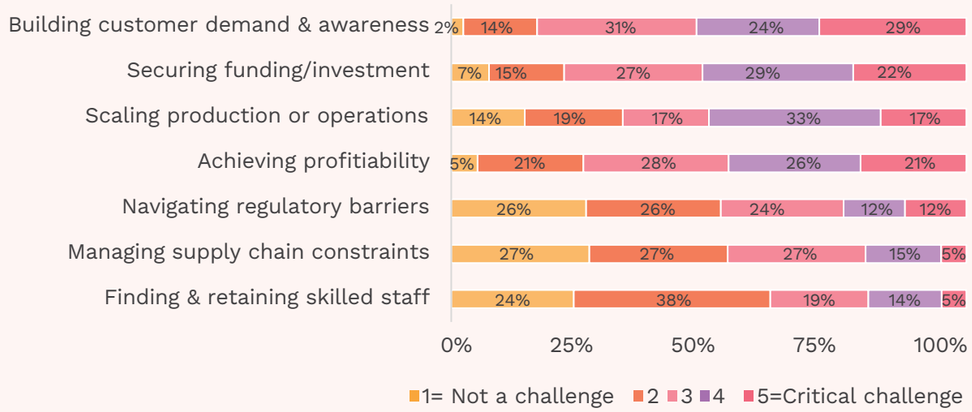
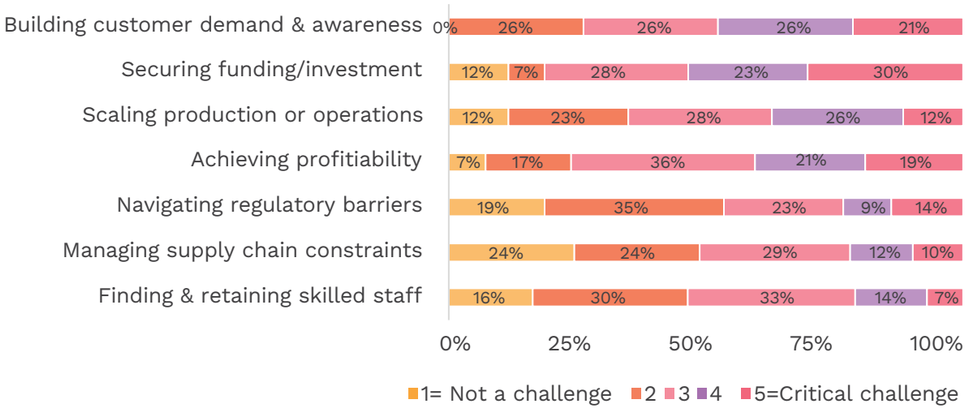


Figure 5: Challenges facing sustainable innovators: 2024



Financial climate and investment landscape

How are sustainable innovation organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand experiencing the current financial climate and funding environment? This section shows that more organisations surveyed are reaching break-even compared to the previous year, but high margins are rarer and capital access remains tight.

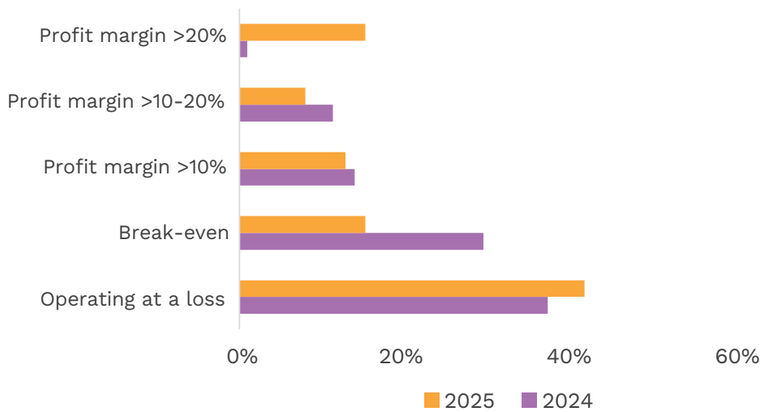
FINANCIAL POSITION IS STABILISING, BUT FEWER ORGANISATIONS ARE ACHIEVING STRONG PROFITABILITY

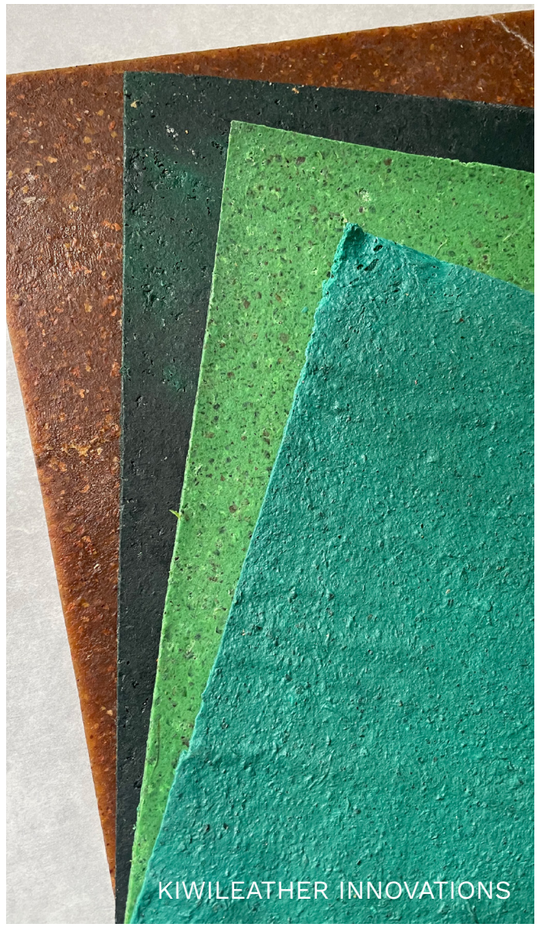
In 2025, 39% of organisations surveyed reported operating at a loss (down slightly from 43% in 2024), suggesting a modest easing of financial pressure. The most notable shift was the increase in organisations at break-even, rising from 17% (2024) to 31% (2025), signalling that more ventures may be moving into operational stability. However, the proportion reporting profit margins above 20% fell sharply from 17% in 2024 to 3% in 2025, indicating that while stability is improving, strong commercial returns are harder to sustain.

FUNDING ACCESS REMAINS DIFFICULT

In 2025, 50% of respondents rated access to funding as difficult, compared with 54% in 2024. A sizable share sat in the middle, with 33% selecting the neutral midpoint in 2025, up from 28% the year before. These findings suggest funding conditions remain challenging for many, with only small movement year-to-year.

Figure 6: Current financial position of sustainable innovators

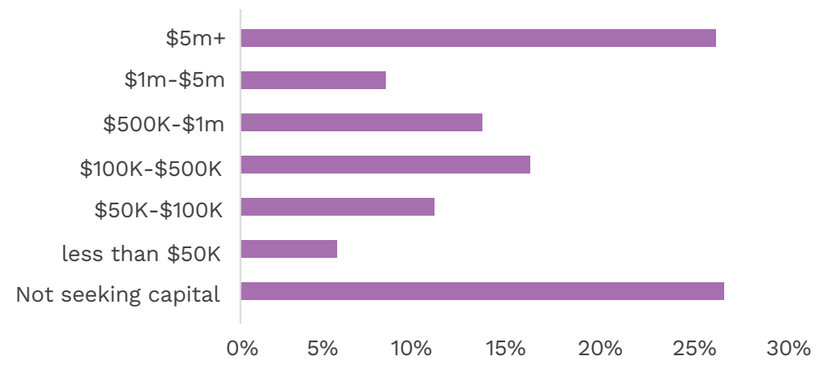




CAPITAL NEEDS ARE VARIED

In 2025, respondents were asked how much external capital they were seeking in the following 12–24 months. The largest single group reported that they are not seeking external capital (26%), while 23% were seeking more than $5m, indicating a cohort preparing for major commercialisation or expansion. Mid-range needs were also common: 15% sought $100k–$500k, 13% sought $500k–$1m, and 10% sought $50k–$100k. Smaller raises were less common, with 5% seeking under $50k and 8% seeking $1m–$5m. These results indicate that the sustainable innovators surveyed are both those consolidating without external capital and looking to fund significant scale.

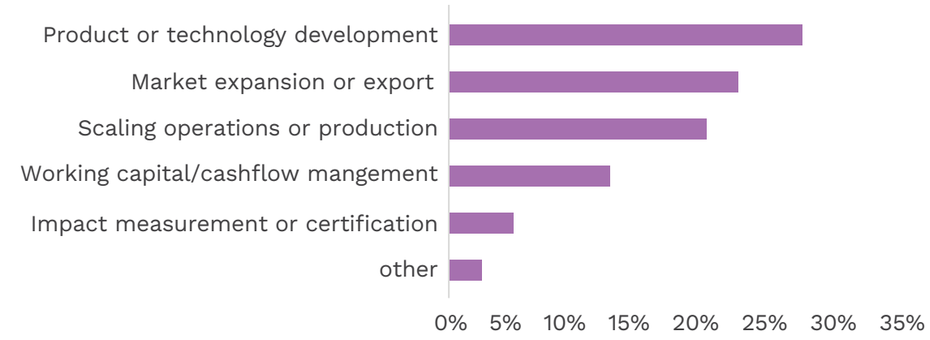
Figure 7: Amount of external capital sought by sustainable innovators (2025 data)



CAPITAL WOULD ENABLE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Where capital was sought, the top uses were product or technology development (31%), market expansion/export (25%) and scaling operations/production (22%). A smaller share aimed to fund working capital/cashflow (14%), while impact measurement or certification (6%) was less common. This profile suggests capital is primarily being pursued to build capability and grow, rather than to cover short-term gaps, though cashflow remains a meaningful need for some.

Figure 8: What access to capital would enable (2025 data)



GRANTS REMAIN CENTRAL, ALONGSIDE GROWING ENGAGEMENT WITH IMPACT AND EQUITY PATHWAYS

In 2025, the most common finance type explored or accessed was grants/government support (75%), highlighting the important role of early-stage funding that helps businesses grow without taking on debt or giving up ownership. Nearly half of organisations surveyed reported engaging impact investors or foundations (45%), with angel/venture investment (41%) and bank loans/credit lines (36%) also significant. Fewer used corporate/strategic investors (21%) or crowdfunding/community investment (14%), and 12% said they had not yet explored any options. These results suggest that many organisations rely heavily on grants while selectively pursuing impact-aligned private capital.

INVESTOR UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION IS GENERALLY STRONG

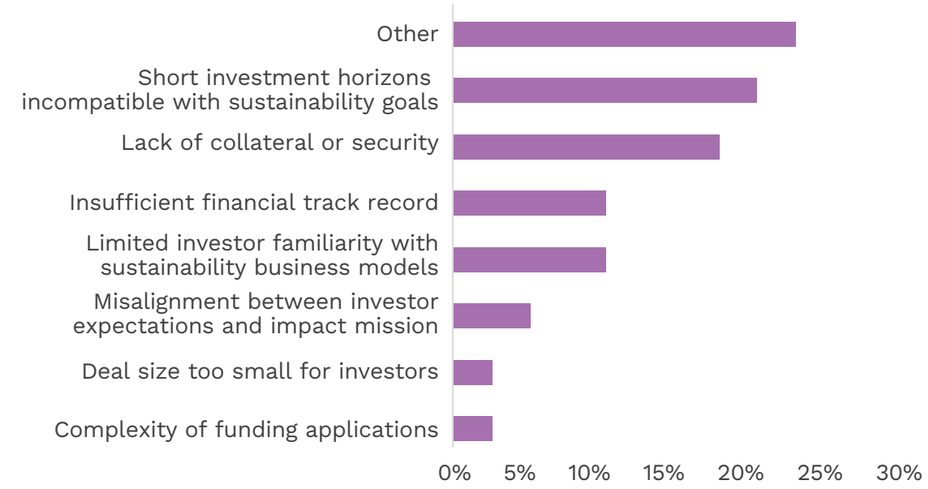
In 2025, most organisations surveyed (78%) reported that current investors or funders understand and value their sustainability mission. This suggests that when organisations do secure capital, it is often from funders with good mission alignment, which can support longer-term partnerships and more realistic growth expectations. This finding highlights a need for mission aligned funding streams.

RUBY

FINANCE IS HARD TO SECURE BECAUSE OF TIME HORIZONS AND LACK OF COLLATERAL

The most frequently cited barrier to securing finance in 2025 was short investment horizons incompatible with sustainability goals (22%), followed by lack of collateral/security (19%). Other notable barriers included limited investor familiarity with sustainability business models (11%) and insufficient financial track record (11%).

Figure 9: Main barriers to securing finance (2025 data)

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PATIENT/FLEXIBLE CAPITAL ATTRACTS INTEREST, ESPECIALLY TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SCALING

If patient capital or flexible capital (e.g. longer-term loans, repayments linked to revenue) were available, 50% of organisations surveyed said they would be likely to apply, 23% were neutral and 28% were unlikely to apply. Among those motivated to pursue patient capital, the dominant reason was the ability to scale sustainably (60%), followed by better alignment with impact objectives (23%). This reinforces the finding that many organisations need capital that matches longer innovation cycles and supports growth without undermining positive impact missions.

WHAT THE FINANCIAL AND INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE TELLS US

The 2025 results indicate the sustainable innovators surveyed are becoming more financially stable, with more organisations reaching break-even. Yet, many organisations are still constrained by capital structures that do not align with sustainable innovation timelines or values. Financial resilience is improving, but high profit margin performance remains rare and access to funding continues to be difficult, with little year-on-year improvement.

Capital demand is increasingly polarised. Some organisations are not raising capital at all while others are seeking large investment rounds, perhaps reflecting divergent levels of maturity and ambition. Where funding relationships do exist, mission alignment tends to be strong, pointing to an opportunity to broaden the pool of investors who understand sustainability-driven models. Overall, the strongest factors likely to help unlock progress are longer investment timeframes and more flexible finance options, given the high interest in patient capital and the ongoing challenge posed by short-term investment horizons.


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Market demand and customer engagement

This section explores how market demand and customer engagement are shifting across the sustainable innovators surveyed. It highlights changes in demand, customer awareness, motivations for sustainable purchasing and the barriers that continue to limit wider adoption.

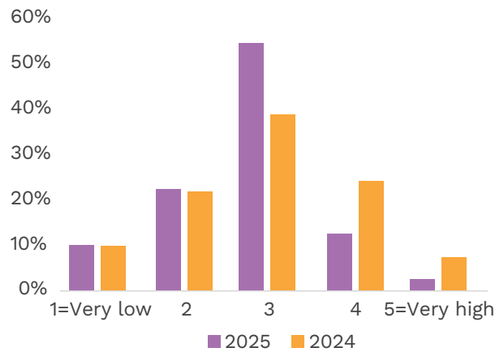
DEMAND IS EDGING UP EVEN AS AWARENESS SOFTENS

Demand for respondents' products and services strengthened slightly in 2025. On a five-point scale where 1 represents significant decline and 5 represents significant growth, the average rating increased from 3.66 in 2024 to 3.71 in 2025. Sixty percent of respondents reported moderate or significant growth in 2025, compared with 52% in 2024. The share of organisations reporting a decline remained low (about 12% in 2025 compared with 9% in 2024).

In contrast, customer awareness of respondents' products or services dipped in 2025. On a five-point scale where 1 represents very low awareness and 5 represents very high awareness, the average score fell from 2.98 in 2024 to 2.76 in 2025. The proportion rating awareness as high (4 or 5) fell from 31% to 14%, with most respondents now clustered at the mid-level (score 3). This finding may indicate that growing demand is coming from audiences already aware of sustainable offerings, with uptake across the broader market still developing.

> "[It's] challenging to grow awareness of our brand and responsible recycling and redistribution programme. Feels like we are carrying the costs for being a responsible business owner when we could just take waste to landfill – which would potentially be a more financially profitable way of doing business. Also low barriers to entry for competitors who do not dispose of waste in a responsible manner."

Figure 10: Customer awareness of sustainability products and services



WHAT MOTIVATES CUSTOMERS TO BUY SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

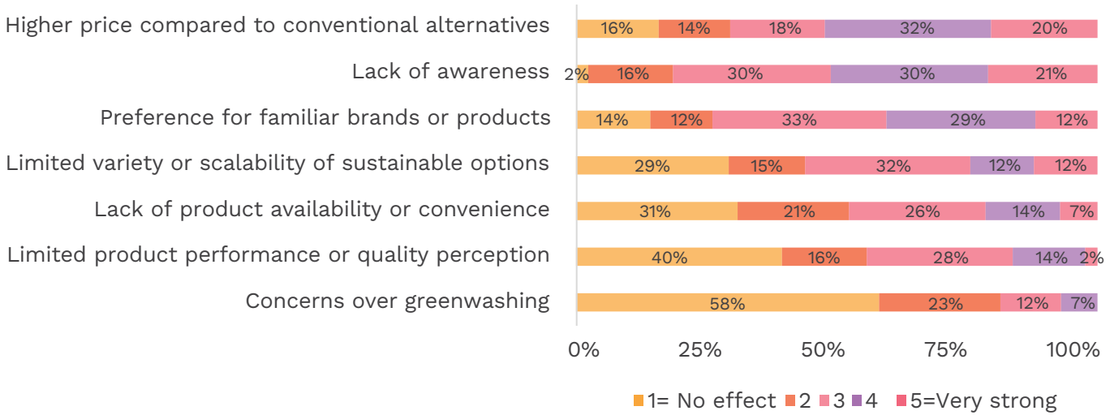
In 2025, respondents reported that the main reasons customers choose their products or services were environmental/ethical values (36%), followed by quality/performance (21%) and price or cost savings (19%). Brand trust accounts for 14%, and 7% cite regulatory compliance.

BARRIERS TO WIDER ADOPTION

Respondents reported behavioural and price-related challenges were key barriers to wider customer adoption of their products and services:

- 'Entrenched habits/resistance to change' was the most cited barrier, with 64% rating it as a strong barrier.
- 52% rated 'higher price vs conventional alternatives' as a strong barrier, indicating price parity and total-cost-of-ownership information remains critical.
- 'Lack of awareness' was a strong barrier for about half the respondents (51%), consistent with the awareness dip noted above.
- Trust and reluctance to change matter, with 41% indicating a preference for familiar brands was a strong barrier.
- 'Limited variety/scalability' and 'availability/convenience' were moderate barriers.
- 56% reported that 'perceived performance limits' were not a barrier, suggesting most offerings are meeting performance expectations.
- Concerns over greenwashing were generally not a strong barrier (58% report "no effect"), though a minority remain wary, underscoring the need for transparent claims.

Figure 11: Barriers to wider customer adoption

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WHAT MARKET DEMAND AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT TELLS US

The combination of rising demand and declining awareness for respondents' products and services indicates organisations are gaining traction with engaged audiences, but low visibility in the broader market is likely to be limiting growth. Mainstream adoption of sustainable products and services is hampered by strong behavioural and price-related barriers, including entrenched habits, higher perceived cost and low awareness.

Opportunities for reaching and persuading more customers to buy sustainable products and services include improving education, storytelling and targeted engagement.

> “Until we value the negative impact of a product or service on the environment over the long term, procurement choices will largely remain focused on the lowest cost.”

> “The current economic downturn is placing environmental/ sustainable priorities low in the budget.”

> “Getting connected to customers is critical. Celebrating sustainable offerings in itself does not always get the message to the right people or organisations. A great event I attended recently had a focus of connecting purchasers with solution providers to great success.”

> “For us, the challenge is bridging that awareness gap. Clients need clearer visibility of the long-term value: lower environmental impact, affordable reusable materials, and the opportunity to support training and employment for Māori and Pasifika communities through our circular economy model.”

> “We're asking people to change their habits and do something completely different, and that's hard. People who know what we are doing often think it's cool, but they don't always buy it!”

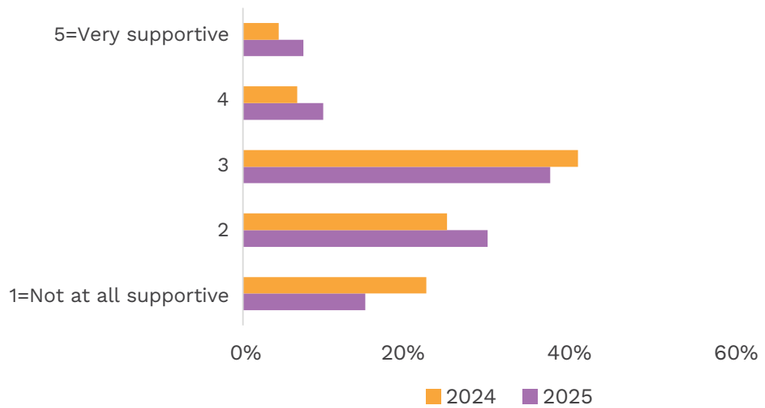
Policy and regulatory environment

In 2025, the sustainable innovators surveyed continued to report that the wider policy and regulatory environment is not yet aligned with the needs of early-stage, impact-driven businesses. Although there are small signs of improvement since 2024, the overall picture is one of mixed support, difficult funding access and persistent regulatory instability.

PERCEIVED POLICY SUPPORT SHOWS ONLY MODEST IMPROVEMENT

Views on how supportive the policy and regulatory environment is for the organisations surveyed rose marginally, with the share rating it as supportive (4 or 5 on a five-point scale, where 1 is not at all supportive and 5 is very supportive) increasing from 11% in 2024 to 18% in 2025. However, those viewing it as unsupportive (1 or 2) remained high at 45%. Overall, results suggest policy settings are not yet strongly enabling progress, with only incremental improvement.

Figure 12: Respondent views on the extent to which Aotearoa New Zealand's policy mechanisms support sustainable innovation



EXISTING POLICIES ARE NOT YET CREATING STRONG COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY

Respondents expressed consistent concerns that current policy mechanisms do not translate into practical commercial opportunities. In 2025, 59% rated the opportunities created by government policy as low, while 23% felt policies were creating opportunities. The average score was 2.38 on a five-point scale, where 1 means not at all and 5 means to a great extent in terms of government policies creating opportunities for respondents' business models. This reinforces the perception that any enabling effects of policy are limited or inconsistent, especially for early-stage ventures.

> "It is a long RnD process to get to a consistent output of sustainable technology. It's not something that can be run through an AI model. We need more government support if the government wants to actually see any tangible change."

> "Within the challenging economic environment we are currently facing, the previous positive gains and forward momentum for environmental awareness and sustainability have most certainly taken a back seat or tossed out completely. The lack of support from central and local regulators to take a tougher stand on environmental practices allows for the proliferation of bad practices and the use of cheap environmentally damaging products. We cannot hope for the industry to suddenly develop a moral compass. Cash is king and the only way that the building and construction industry will change is via the development and implementation of appropriate regulatory policies and practices."

REGULATORY PREDICTABILITY REMAINS A SIGNIFICANT CONCERN

Stability and predictability of sustainability-related regulation remain areas of concern. In 2025, 55% of respondents rated the regulatory environment as unstable (1 or 2 on a five-point scale, where 1 is very unstable and 5 is very stable), while only 8% rated it as stable (4 or 5). The average score of 2.33 reflects a broader sense of uncertainty around shifting standards, pathways and compliance expectations, complicating planning and investment decisions.

ORGANISATIONS RELY MOST HEAVILY ON NETWORKS AND ASSOCIATIONS FOR SUPPORT

Engagement with policy occurs primarily through intermediary organisations rather than directly through government. In 2025:

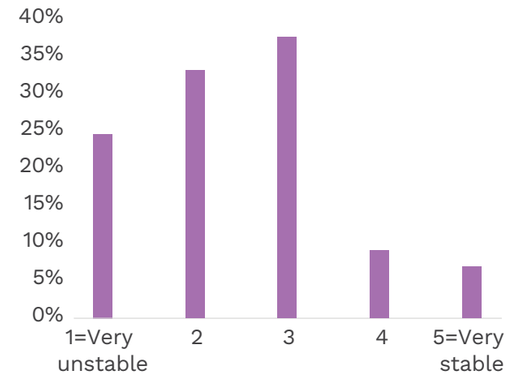
- 48% engaged with research or innovation networks
- 45% engaged with industry associations
- 33% engaged with local government
- 33% engaged with central government
- 12% did not engage with any level of support

These patterns suggest that networks and industry associations play a critical bridging role, helping organisations navigate policy complexity, access knowledge and build visibility.

WHAT THE POLICY AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT TELLS US

The findings indicate that while policy support for sustainable innovators surveyed has improved slightly, the sector remains constrained by structural policy challenges that slow scaling and increase risk. Weak policy signals mean businesses are increasingly reliant on innovation networks and industry associations, possibly filling gaps left by an unstable regulatory environment.

Figure 13: The extent to which organisations find the regulatory environment related to sustainability predictable and stable



WATERSMART

Innovation and future outlook

How do the sustainable innovators surveyed foresee the future? Insights in this section provide a forward-looking view of where momentum is building and where action is needed to support long-term, mission-aligned growth.

ACCELERATING INNOVATIONS AND IMPACT

Respondents were asked to identify what would significantly accelerate their organisation/innovation's impact. Responses clustered around four key themes:

- **Access to funding and investment:** Reliable and timely funding was the most consistently expressed accelerator of impact, enabling organisations to plan long-term, scale operations and progress R&D. Many respondents emphasised that without sufficient capital, even promising innovations struggle to grow or reach market: “Stable funding allowing longer term planning”.
- **Regulatory and government enablement:** Many organisations viewed supportive regulation and policy environments as essential for scaling innovation, particularly when existing rules limit uptake or create administrative barriers. Respondents highlighted that enabling legislative and regulatory mechanisms can accelerate market entry and support rapid adoption: “An enabling regulatory environment and investment to scale”.
- **Growing consumer demand and awareness:** Respondents repeatedly noted that impact increases significantly when customers commit to integrating innovations into their operations, especially early adopters or influential users: “Connection to the individuals or organisations that could be early adopters”. Some respondents indicated a need for “support with creating awareness of brand”.
- **Strengthening capability and partnerships:** Respondents indicated scaling impact often requires strengthened internal capabilities, such as R&D capacity, access to specialised facilities or manufacturing technologies, as well as strong external partnerships. Respondents highlighted the need for stable supply chains, technical infrastructure and collaborative networks that enable replication and growth: “increased access to consistent, scalable supply chains for salvaged materials”. Partnerships with co-founders, industry groups and community initiatives also play a critical role in driving momentum.

EMERGING TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS

Respondents identified several trends that they expect to shape organisational innovation and capability over the next five years. Trends spanned artificial intelligence, circular innovations, energy transitions and consumer expectations. Overall, responses reflect a rapidly evolving operating environment where digital transformation, environmental impacts and shifting public trust are central drivers of change.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** was the most consistently mentioned trend. Respondents expect automation and intelligent tools to increase efficiency, accuracy and productivity while enabling new forms of problem solving: “AI, VR and Robotics – all lead to more efficient ways to build creating less waste...”
- **Innovations that enable circularity:** Sustainability-focused innovations are expected to accelerate circular practices, improve material traceability and reduce environmental impact. Respondents highlight the growing importance of low-impact processing technologies and for systems that enable transparent resource flows: “Advances in logistics and modular reuse systems... will make it easier for salvaged materials to compete with virgin products...”
- **Energy transitions:** Respondents noted rising pressure on existing electricity markets and the need for more distributed and resilient energy systems: “Pressure on the current electricity market and sector to enable local, distributed solutions to operate”. Innovations such as improved marine battery packs and energy-efficient heating, cooling and solar systems were cited as important.
- **Shifting consumer expectations:** Growing consumer scrutiny is driving demand for authenticity and transparent sustainability claims. Respondents noted increasing backlash against greenwashing and a shift toward meaningful and sustainable initiatives: “Greenwashing is one of the biggest threats to genuine sustainability efforts...” These trends suggest organisations will need to invest in authentic sustainability practices to maintain trust and competitiveness.

SOLID

Opportunities to accelerate sustainable innovation and impact in Aotearoa New Zealand

1. UNLOCK FIT-FOR-PURPOSE, LONG-HORIZON FINANCE TO ENABLE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The report repeatedly highlights financial constraints as a critical challenge impacting scaling, talent, market expansion and long-term planning. Access to impact-aligned capital remains structurally difficult.

There is a clear opportunity to expand access to mission-aligned, long-horizon, flexible finance through patient capital, blended funding models, impact-aligned investment partnerships and investor education. Doing so would unlock R&D, accelerate scaling and enable organisations to pursue growth without compromising impact integrity.

2. CREATE A STABLE, ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT THAT GIVES INNOVATORS CONFIDENCE

Policy instability affects investment confidence, market demand and the viability of sustainable alternatives. The innovators surveyed repeatedly highlight that current regulation does not reward sustainable practice.

The opportunity lies in strengthening policy predictability and aligning regulatory settings with sustainability outcomes. Long-term, stable signals would encourage investment, protect responsible innovators from being undercut by low-cost harmful practices and help New Zealand capture emerging sustainable innovation markets.

3. EXPAND CUSTOMER ACCESS, AWARENESS AND EDUCATION TO BUILD MAINSTREAM DEMAND

Demand is rising, but awareness is falling for respondents' products and services. The innovators surveyed are gaining traction with engaged audiences, but mainstream adoption remains slow due to behaviours, familiarity and price expectations.

There is clear opportunity to grow market demand by improving visibility, education and storytelling around sustainable products and services. Better connections between procurement teams and innovative suppliers, consumer awareness campaigns, clearer communication of whole-of-life value (such as durability, lower running costs and reduced waste) and more direct links between buyers and innovators would expand markets and accelerate adoption beyond early adopters.

4. STRENGTHEN CAPABILITY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT SCALING

Survey results indicate that capability and infrastructure gaps limit the ability of sustainable innovations to achieve the scale needed to transform systems. Many small innovators surveyed shoulder disproportionate operational costs and lack access to supply chain infrastructure or specialised facilities.

Enhancing sector capability through technical support, shared infrastructure, community-level funding and partnership brokering would unlock faster scaling and broader impact. This is especially critical in circular systems, materials recovery, manufacturing and early-stage innovation.

Enabling the next wave of sustainable innovation

The Sustainable Business Network (SBN) is working to help address several of the barriers identified in this report and accelerate the growth of sustainable innovators in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Through the annual Sustainable Business Awards, SBN is raising the visibility of emerging sustainable businesses and connecting them to wider networks and opportunities. Ongoing promotion through storytelling, events and communication channels helps showcase credible innovators to potential customers, partners and supporters.

SBN's annual Next Fest event creates a platform for innovators, corporates, investors and system enablers to connect around the conditions needed for sustainable innovation to scale.

Alongside this, SBN continues to provide practical support across its network and is working to establish a dedicated loan fund designed to improve access to fit-for-purpose capital for sustainable businesses seeking to grow.

Together, these initiatives aim to improve the enabling conditions around sustainable innovation - increasing visibility, strengthening connections and expanding access to capital.

MEDSALV

Appendix: Next Wave 2025 & 2024 summary tables

Notes:

1. Sample size 2024: N=44
2. Sample size 2025: N=42
3. 2025 sample includes new and returning participants
4. Pairwise deletion applies

* New question 2025

**Modified question 2025

Q1C. WHAT SECTOR DOES YOUR ORGANISATION OPERATE WITHIN?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Primary	4	10%	2	5%
Manufacturing	10	24%	11	26%
Energy	2	5%	2	5%
Other utilities (eg water, waste)	1	2%	2	5%
Built Environment	11	27%	4	9%
Retail	3	7%	2	5%
Accommodation & Food services	4	10%	3	7%
Transport	2	5%	1	2%
Information Media & Telecommunications	0	0%	2	5%
Financial & Insurance Services	0	0%	2	5%
Education & Training	0	0%	0	0%
Healthcare	1	2%	1	2%
Professional services	1	2%	1	2%
Other	2	5%	10	23%

Q1D. HOW MANY EMPLOYEES DOES YOUR ORGANISATION HAVE?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1 - 5	19	48%	18	41%
6 - 20	11	28%	16	36%
21 - 50	4	10%	8	18%
51 -100	2	5%	1	2%
100+	4	10%	1	2%

Q1E. WHAT IS YOUR ORGANISATION'S ANNUAL REVENUE?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
pre-revenue	8	21%	8	19%
<$500k	17	45%	12	28%
$500k - $1m	3	8%	7	16%
$1m - $5m	2	5%	10	23%
$5m - $10m	3	8%	4	9%
$10m +	5	13%	2	5%

Q2A. OVER THE PAST YEAR, HOW HAS YOUR REVENUE CHANGED?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Declined by more than 10%	3	8%	5	12%
Declined by up to 10%	3	8%	0	0%
Stable (no significant change)	17	43%	18	43%
Grew by up to 10%	4	10%	6	14%
Grew by 10-20%	1	3%	3	7%
Grew by more than 20%	12	30%	10	24%

Q2B. HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU IN YOUR BUSINESS OR INNOVATION'S GROWTH PROSPECTS FOR THE NEXT YEAR?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1=Not confident	1	2%	3	7%
2	3	7%	2	5%
3	10	24%	10	23%
4	13	31%	15	34%
5=Extremely confident	15	36%	14	32%
Mean	3.9		3.8	
Median	4		4	
Standard deviation	1.05		1.15	

Q2C. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES APPLY TO YOUR ORGANISATION/ INNOVATION?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Expanding to new markets	30	71%	30	71%
Launching new products/services	33	79%	23	55%
Securing investment/funding	25	60%	22	52%
Scaling operations	33	79%	28	67%
Growing brand awareness	33	79%	33	79%
Increasing profitability	25	60%	17	40%
other	1	2%	2	5%

NAUT

Q3B. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE CHALLENGES YOUR ORGANISATION/INNOVATION CURRENTLY FACES?

	2025									
	1=not a challenge		2		3		4		5=severe challenge	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Securing funding / investment	3	7%	6	15%	11	27%	12	29%	9	22%
Finding & retaining skilled staff	10	24%	16	38%	8	19%	6	14%	2	5%
Scaling production or operations	6	14%	8	19%	7	17%	14	33%	7	17%
Building customer demand & awareness	1	2%	6	14%	13	31%	10	24%	12	29%
Managing supply chain constraints	11	27%	11	27%	11	27%	6	15%	2	5%
Navigating regulatory barriers	11	26%	11	26%	10	24%	5	12%	5	12%
Achieving profitability	2	5%	8	21%	11	28%	10	26%	8	21%

	2024									
	1=not a challenge		2		3		4		5=severe challenge	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Securing funding / investment	5	12%	3	7%	12	28%	10	23%	13	30%
Finding & retaining skilled staff	7	16%	13	30%	14	33%	6	14%	3	7%
Scaling production or operations	5	12%	10	23%	12	28%	11	26%	5	12%
Building customer demand & awareness	0	0%	11	26%	11	26%	11	26%	9	21%
Managing supply chain constraints	10	24%	10	24%	12	29%	5	12%	4	10%
Navigating regulatory barriers	8	19%	15	35%	10	23%	4	9%	6	14%
Achieving profitability	3	7%	7	17%	15	36%	9	21%	8	19%

Q4A. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Operating at a loss	15	38%	18	43%
Break-even	12	31%	7	17%
Profit margin <10%	6	15%	6	14%
Profit margin 10-20%	5	13%	4	10%
Profit margin >20%	1	3%	7	17%

Q4B. HOW EASY OR DIFFICULT IS IT TO ACCESS FUNDING FOR YOUR BUSINESS ORGANISATION/INNOVATION?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1=Very easy	3	8%	1	2%
2	4	10%	7	16%
3	13	33%	12	28%
4	12	30%	9	21%
5=Very difficult	8	20%	14	33%
Mean	3.45		3.65	
Median	3.5		4	
Standard deviation	1.15		1.17	

Q4C. HOW MUCH EXTERNAL CAPITAL ARE YOU SEEKING IN THE NEXT 12-24 MONTHS?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
less than $50k	2	5%
$50k-$100k	4	10%
$100k-$500k	6	15%
$500k-$1m	5	13%
$1m-$5m	3	8%
$5m+	9	23%
Not seeking capital	10	23%

*New question 2025

Q4D. WHAT WOULD THIS CAPITAL PRIMARILY ENABLE? *

	2025	
	Count	Percent
Product or technology development	11	31%
Market expansion or export	9	25%
Scaling operations or production	8	22%
Working capital / cashflow management	5	14%
Impact measurement or certification	2	6%
other	1	3%

*New question 2025

Q4E. WHICH TYPES OF FINANCE HAVE YOU EXPLORED OR ACCESSED?**

	2025	
	Count	Percent
Grants / government support	30	71%
Angel / venture investment	17	40%
Bank loans or credit lines	15	36%
Impact investors or foundations	19	45%
Corporate or strategic investors	9	21%
Crowdfunding / community investment	6	14%
None yet â€“ still exploring options	5	12%

**Question modified 2025

Q4F. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUR CURRENT INVESTORS OR FUNDERS UNDERSTAND AND VALUE YOUR SUSTAINABILITY MISSION?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
1=Not at all	1	2%
2	0	0%
3	8	20%
4	13	32%
5=Fully understand	19	46%
Mean	4.2	
Median	4	
Standard deviation	0.93	

*New question 2025

Q4G. WHAT ARE THE MAIN BARRIERS PREVENTING YOU FROM SECURING FINANCE?*

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Lack of collateral or security	7	19%	1	2%
Limited investor familiarity with sustainability business models	4	11%	7	16%
Insufficient financial track record	4	11%	12	28%
Complexity of funding applications	1	3%	9	21%
Deal size too small for investors	1	3%	1	2%
Misalignment between investor expectations and impact mission	2	6%	7	16%
Short investment horizons incompatible with sustainability goals	8	22%	12	28%
other	9	25%	9	21%

Q4H. IF PATIENT OR FLEXIBLE CAPITAL OPTIONS, LIKE LONGER-TERM LOANS OR REPAYMENTS LINKED TO REVENUE, WERE AVAILABLE, HOW LIKELY WOULD YOU BE TO APPLY?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
Lack of collateral or security	7	19%
Limited investor familiarity with sustainability business models	4	11%
Insufficient financial track record	4	11%
Complexity of funding applications	1	3%
Deal size too small for investors	1	3%
Misalignment between investor expectations and impact mission	2	6%
Short investment horizons incompatible with sustainability goals	8	22%
other	9	25%

*New question 2025

Q4I. IF YOU WERE LIKELY TO APPLY FOR PATIENT OR FLEXIBLE CAPITAL WHAT WOULD BE YOUR PRIMARY MOTIVATION?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
Reduced pressure for rapid returns	3	9%
Better alignment with impact objectives	8	23%
Ability to scale sustainably	21	60%
other	3	9%

*New question 2025

Q5A. HOW HAS DEMAND FOR YOUR PRODUCT/SERVICE CHANGED IN THE PAST YEAR?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1 = Significant decline	1	2%	1	2%
2	4	10%	3	7%
3	12	29%	17	39%
4	14	33%	12	27%
5 = Significant growth	11	26%	11	25%
Mean	**3.71**		**3.66**	
Median	**4**		**4**	
Standard deviation	**1.04**		**1.01**	

Q5B. HOW WOULD YOU RATE CUSTOMER AWARENESS OF YOUR OFFERING?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1 = Very low	4	10%	4	10%
2	9	22%	9	21%
3	22	54%	16	38%
4	5	12%	10	24%
5 = Very high	1	2%	3	7%
Mean	**2.76**		**2.98**	
Median	**3**		**3**	
Standard deviation	**0.89**		**1.07**	

Q5C. HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CUSTOMERS' PRIMARY MOTIVATION FOR PURCHASING YOUR SUSTAINABLE OFFERING?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
Price or cost savings	8	19%
Environmental or ethical values	15	36%
Quality or performance	9	21%
Brand reputation or trust	6	14%
Regulatory compliance (B2B only)	3	7%
other	1	2%

*New question 2025

Q5D. HOW WOULD YOU RATE THESE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO WIDER CUSTOMER ADOPTION?*

	2025									
	1=no effect		2		3		4		5=very strong effect	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Lack of awareness	1	2%	7	16%	13	30%	13	30%	9	21%
Higher price compared to conventional alternatives	7	16%	6	14%	8	18%	14	32%	9	20%
Limited product performance or quality perception	17	40%	7	16%	12	28%	6	14%	1	2%
Lack of product availability or convenience	13	31%	9	21%	11	26%	6	14%	3	7%
Entrenched habits or resistance to change	2	5%	5	11%	9	20%	13	30%	15	34%
Preference for familiar brands or products	6	14%	5	12%	14	33%	12	29%	5	12%
Limited variety or scalability of sustainable options	12	29%	6	15%	13	32%	5	12%	5	12%
Concerns over greenwashing	25	58%	10	23%	5	12%	3	7%	0	0%

*New question 2025

Q6A. HOW SUPPORTIVE IS NEW ZEALAND'S POLICY AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR BUSINESS MODEL?

	2025		2024	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
1 = Not at all supportive	6	15%	10	23%
2	12	30%	11	25%
3	15	38%	18	41%
4	4	10%	3	7%
5 = Very supportive	3	8%	2	5%
Mean	**2.65**		**2.45**	
Median	**3**		**3**	
Standard deviation	**1.1**		**1.07**	

Q6C. TO WHAT EXTENT DO EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICIES (E.G. SUBSIDIES, PROCUREMENT, STANDARDS) CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR BUSINESS MODEL?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
1 = Not at all	12	31%
2	11	28%
3	7	18%
4	7	18%
5 = A great extent	2	5%
Mean	**2.38**	
Median	**2**	
Standard deviation	**1.25**	

*New question 2025

Q6D. HOW PREDICTABLE AND STABLE DO YOU FIND THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT RELATED TO SUSTAINABILITY IN NEW ZEALAND?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
1 = Very unstable	9	23%
2	13	33%
3	15	38%
4	2	5%
5 = Very stable	1	3%
Mean	**2.33**	
Median	**2**	
Standard deviation	**0.97**	

*New question 2025

Q6E. WHICH LEVEL OF SUPPORT DO YOU ENGAGE WITH MOST ACTIVELY?*

	2025	
	Count	Percent
Local government	14	33%
Central government	14	33%
Industry associations	19	45%
Research or innovation networks	20	48%
None	5	12%

*New question 2025


LANACO

Q7A. WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WOULD MOST HELP YOUR ORGANISATION / INNOVATION SUCCEED?

	2025									
	1=Not at all		2		3		4		5=A great extent	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Access to investment/funding	0	0%	3	8%	9	23%	9	23%	19	48%
Govt policy & regulatory support	4	10%	6	15%	9	23%	5	13%	16	40%
Marketing & customer awareness	1	3%	2	5%	7	18%	13	33%	17	43%
Supply chain/logistics support	8	20%	10	24%	8	20%	7	17%	8	20%
Talent & workforce development	8	21%	9	23%	8	21%	10	26%	4	10%
Technology or infrastructure access	8	20%	8	20%	9	23%	8	20%	7	18%
Mentoring	14	35%	8	20%	10	25%	6	15%	2	5%
ESG/Sustainability	8	20%	3	8%	11	28%	14	35%	4	10%

	2024									
	1=Not at all		2		3		4		5=A great extent	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Access to investment/funding	3	7%	3	7%	4	9%	12	27%	22	50%
Govt policy & regulatory support	3	7%	3	7%	10	23%	8	19%	19	44%
Marketing & customer awareness	1	2%	3	7%	11	26%	11	26%	16	38%
Supply chain/logistics support	9	22%	11	27%	13	32%	4	10%	4	10%
Talent & workforce development	6	14%	12	29%	12	29%	4	10%	8	19%
Technology or infrastructure access	6	15%	11	28%	10	25%	6	15%	7	18%
Mentoring	5	13%	16	40%	9	23%	9	23%	1	3%
ESG/Sustainability	5	13%	8	20%	10	25%	12	30%	5	13%

Disruptive Innovation 2025

Organisations that were finalists in the Disruptive Innovation category of the 2025 Sustainable Business Awards and invited to participate in this research:

3R Group

3R Group runs Tyrewise, New Zealand's first regulated product stewardship scheme. In one year of operation, Tyrewise has collected more than three million end-of-life tyres, so they can be reused and recycled.

Árbol

Árbol manufactures pre-built high-performance, low-energy homes that reduce environmental impact while enhancing health, comfort and affordability.

Aro Ha Wellness Retreat

This Glenorchy wellness retreat integrates architecture, technology and environmental philosophy to create a model for hospitality that prioritises both human wellbeing and ecological health. Operations are guided by Net Zero energy principles, Passivhaus design and permaculture practices.

Autex Acoustics

Autex designs and supplies acoustic panels and insulation products. Its 'bio-based', acoustic Embrace Wall System uses certified Nature Positive New Zealand wool.

Basis

The Basis Smart Panel helps households shift electricity usage from periods of high demand to low demand. This can halve energy consumption.

BioLumic

BioLumic uses ultraviolet light to activate beneficial seed traits for crop production. This increases yields, nutritional composition and nutrient efficiency, while reducing carbon emissions. It's a world-first technology that avoids the use of chemicals or GMOs.

Biowave

Biowave is a marine fuel technology that transforms radiata pine into liquid fuel to power ships. The bio-oil can be blended with existing heavy marine fuel oils. The technology overcomes long-standing barriers that have prevented the use of bio-oils in shipping.

Blackcurrent

Blackcurrent's FLEX is a modular, intelligent microgrid platform designed to electrify rural New Zealand. It empowers farms and agri-businesses to generate, store and manage energy locally.

Cahoots Workshop

Cahoots is a community space for women and gender minorities to empower them in building, fixing and making.

CarbonCrop

CarbonCrop is a toolkit to manage forest carbon projects on farms. It supports the management of forests across multiple sites, landowners and regions.

Citizen

Citizen is Aotearoa New Zealand's first 'rescue and upcycle' organisation. It rescues edible food that's currently going to waste and creates high quality, low impact food and beverages. Starting with bread, Citizen is now focusing on fruit and vegetables.

Circle Living

Circle Living is reimagining housing in Aotearoa New Zealand by developing regenerative cohousing neighbourhoods. The Tākaka Cohousing neighbourhood was created in partnership with Te Hapori Hauora Community Land Trust, prioritising long-term affordability, ecological restoration and community wellbeing.

Circular Plastics New Zealand

Circular Plastics NZ has collected and recycled 4.3 tonnes of used plastic flower sleeves.

Clean for Good

Clean for Good replaces toxic chemicals in the cleaning industry with safer enzyme-based solutions. Bottles and triggers are reused and recycled, and uniforms are repurposed. Microplastics from washing are collected and converted into 3D printer filaments, and the company funds native tree planting.

Clevaco New Zealand

CLEVA POD is a 100% recycled plastic house foundation system that replaces traditional polystyrene pods. The recycled plastic used can be recovered and repurposed multiple times over a span of 150+ years.

ClipCrate

ClipCrate creates durable, modular packaging crates to replace disposable alternatives. They prioritise longevity, repairability and recyclability.

CoShop

CoShop is a platform that transforms local food systems through demand-driven agriculture. The platform coordinates ordering so producers only harvest what customers have ordered, reducing food waste.

Cozy Crops

Cozy Crops is a New Zealand-made wool pellet that repurposes low-quality sheep wool that would otherwise go to waste. It acts as a mulch, natural fertiliser and natural pest deterrence against slugs and snails.

Critical

Cleanstone by Critical is a 100% recycled plastic panel. It transforms hard-to-recycle plastic waste into durable, beautiful and recyclable materials.

Destination Charge

Destination Charge has created a device to turn ordinary power sockets into smart, EV chargers at overnight stay locations. It's a low cost innovation using existing infrastructure.

East Coast Exchange

This digital, community marketplace facilitates ways to pay and get paid for the work of community resilience and nature regeneration. It was created in Tairāwhiti after Cyclone Gabrielle.

Eco-index

Eco-index has created digital tools that reimagine how environmental data is accessed and applied. They help people make science-informed decisions about investing in nature.

Ekos

Ekos has developed a biodiversity credits scheme to address the finance gap for biodiversity conservation. The Ekos BioCredita Programme includes measurement, reporting and verification.

Ellis Label

Ellis Label is a fashion brand that produces garments made-to-order or in limited runs using natural and limited rolls of fabrics. It works closely with local suppliers. Each piece is cut by hand and leftover materials are repurposed.

Essity Australasia

Essity produces some of New Zealand's most popular hygiene paper products on a Kawerau paper machine using fully renewable geothermal steam drying. This is a world first.

Etū Rākau Charitable Trust

Through the Mangere Enviro Hub, Etū Rākau Charitable Trust works with rangatahi to seed native trees, grow kai and transform food waste into compost. The organisation blends Mātauranga Māori with digital tools to empower youth and regenerate the land.

FillGood

Fillgood is a reuse system for events, venues and hospitality, replacing single-use cups and containers with reusables.

Foodprint

Foodprint is a food rescue app. It partners with local eateries, giving them a platform to sell surplus and imperfect food for a discount to prevent it going to waste. Foodprint has grown to a community of 160,000 app users and 600 eateries.

Garage Project

Garage Project brewery has implemented a circular system to compost waste hops and yeast back into the soil. This avoids more than 60 tonnes of organic waste going to landfill each year.

Goodbye

Goodbye produces natural, water-free sunscreen. The company is innovating in refillable and recyclable packaging for both retail and industry needs.

GoodWrap Recycling

GoodWrap provides stewardship programmes for managing soft plastics. It makes it easy for manufacturers and suppliers to collect soft plastics after use, using reverse logistics to transport the plastics to New Zealand-based recycling facilities.

Hiberna Modular

Hiberna Modular makes prefabricated straw panel systems for high-performance, low-carbon buildings.

Hilti NZ

Hilti NZ is transforming power tool ownership through a circular model built on reduce, reuse and recycle. This extends tool life by three times and recovers 90% of components.

ImpacTex

ImpacTex is New Zealand's only full-circle multi-textile recovery and recycling operation. It collaborates with local innovators to transform textile waste into products like signage, corporate gifts, desk tops and acoustic panelling. These products are fully recyclable.

JT Group

JT Group's 100% electric building wash system slashes water use, reduces carbon emissions and cuts large-scale cleaning jobs from days to hours. It comprises a self-climbing, robotic building wash machine and electric water blaster.

Junk2Good

Through the Junk2Good initiative, Junk2Go partners with charities to donate thousands of items it picks up in daily junk collections, saving them from landfill.

Kelmarna Community Farm

Kelmarna Community Farm in central Auckland combines regenerative farming, social support and education. It reinvests 100% of revenue into building a climate-friendly food system to support community health and wellbeing through education, volunteering, composting and horticulture therapy.

KiwiKrete

KiwiKrete is a concrete innovation that replaces some conventional concrete ingredients with waste kina shells and other aquaculture by-products. This reduces reliance on finite resources and carbon-intensive cement.

KiwiLeather Innovations

KiwiLeather Innovations transforms kiwifruit waste into a world-first, plastic-free vegan leather. This reduces carbon emissions by more than 90% compared to animal leather while creating value from waste.

Lanaco

Lanaco designs and manufactures air filter products using New Zealand wool. The EcoStatic ML Series is the world's first 100% certified biobased and biodegradable filter media.

Lastmyle

Lastmyle created Maestro, which is part-device and part-software platform. It comprises low cost devices that connect consumer energy appliances to the grid. The AI-enabled platform saves energy and money by shifting energy use away from peak periods.

Le Velo Studio

These e-bikes are ultra light and elegant, designed to last and be repaired. They are made in New Zealand, from design to assembly.

Living House

Living House is an architecturally-designed, modular housing system. It's a scalable housing solution to meet the demand for affordable homes that are also healthy, energy-efficient, fast build and well-designed. This is a collaboration between The Lever Room, RTA Studio, Fisher & Paykel and Red Stag Timber Lab.

Lof

Lof's Wool Hoop programme transforms local 'waste' wool into a renewable, repairable and compostable lighting product. It's designed and made in New Zealand and farmers are paid fairly.

Mara Bio

Mara Bio has developed fermentation technology to create value from food industry by-products. It has created new proteins, fibres and bioactive ingredients that have significantly lower environmental impact than conventional proteins.

Marley NZ (Aliaxis Group)

Marley manufactures plastic piping systems using recycled plastic materials. In a New Zealand first, it is recycling uPVC and HDPE plastic from the built environment back into a durable product for the built environment, at scale.

Medsalv

Medsalv remanufactures single-use medical devices for safe reuse in hospitals across Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. This eliminates unnecessary waste and carbon emissions while cutting costs.

Mohoao Seed

Mohoao is a range of handcrafted herbal teas made from wild fennel grown on whānau-owned land. The company is transforming underutilised Māori land into a thriving, income-generating resource.

Mugcycle

Mugcycle reduces single-use cups by providing second hand mugs as an alternative at cafes, events and public places. It also has a network of drop off points so mugs can be returned to multiple locations.

Mushroom Material

Mushroom Material has created a home-compostable alternative to polystyrene made from mycelium and agricultural waste. The product is waterproof, flame retardant and with the same protective, thermal and acoustic properties as polystyrene. It can fully biodegrade within months.

Mutu

Mutu is a material sharing app that makes it easy for staff within a business to list and share surplus items. This has kept two million kilograms of construction materials out of landfill and redirected to other projects.

NE Tech

NE Tech's patented technology reimagines how natural oils are harvested. Its low-energy extraction process eliminates drying and milling, slashing emissions and costs. The process turns waste into revenue.

Naut

Naut manufactures high-powered electric propulsion systems for boats. They deliver fossil-fuel performance without the noise, emissions or maintenance. Naut partners with boat builders to electrify their current models, making it commercially viable.

nezo

nezo (formerly V-Quest) is a software tool that helps architects and engineers design sustainable buildings. It combines real-time analysis of cost, embodied carbon and design efficiency in a single platform, helping users balance vision, budget and climate impact.

Ngā Waihua o Paerangi (Ngāti Rangi)

The Whiria Ngā Hua fund empowers whānau to design and lead their own initiatives, focused around wellbeing outcomes. The model is driven by whānau for whānau.

ŌKU New Zealand

ŌKU New Zealand creates award-winning rongoā wellness products that regenerate land, culture and health. From solar power, compostable packaging and regenerative planting, every aspect of the business is designed to give back to Papatūānuku. It is a Māori-led, B Corp certified enterprise.

Orba Shoes

Orba Shoes is redesigning the materials used in footwear to avoid plastics and petrochemicals. Each pair of shoes is made from renewable, plant-based components - from non-toxic adhesives and fabric protectants to compostable packaging.

Packaging Recyclers

Packaging Recyclers diverts used cardboard boxes from waste so they can be reused, extending their lifespan and reducing emissions from recycling, manufacturing and disposal.

Planetary Accounting Network

Planetary Facts are a new environmental label that communicates holistic environmental performance. They simplify complex environmental data to help people understand what 'good' looks like at a glance.

Power Trip

Power Trip provides software and data insights to help businesses electrify their vehicle fleets and for individual EV owners to plan their journeys.

Powered by Plants NZ

Powered by Plants buys surplus and waste fruit and vegetables and transforms it into high-quality, nutritious, affordable powders and juice concentrates. Any waste not fit for upcycling goes to create on-farm bioenergy as well as insect protein and biofertiliser.

Predator Free NZ

The Predator Free Apprentice Programme has supported more than 100 apprentices through conservation training, qualifications and community engagement. 98% of graduates secured employment in the conservation sector after the two-year programme.

Quadrent

Quadrent diverts used corporate technology, such as laptops, to schools and communities in need. It incorporates a leasing finance solution.

Recycle a Dunger

Recycle a Dunger (RAD) rehomes second-hand bikes, recovers parts and teaches people how to fix and maintain their own bikes. It diverts almost 8,000 bikes and bike parts from landfill each year.

Respond Bio

Respond Bio is a patented biological innovation that regenerates soils while boosting farm productivity. It enables plants to directly absorb nitrogen and phosphorus to unlock stronger yields with less chemical input.

Ruby

RUBY Says Recycle is a circular fashion programme created by fashion brand RUBY. It's New Zealand's first second-hand, own-brand clothing store. It promotes the resale of Ruby clothing. Customers can return clothes in exchange for a voucher.

Ryder Specialty Coffee

Ryder is the first commercial electric coffee roaster in New Zealand. The specialty coffee company is focused on minimising its carbon footprint while working with producers to ensure fair wages and sustainable practices.

Scentian Bio

Scentian Bio uses insect smell receptors to build an 'electronic nose' that can detect tiny chemical signals in air or liquid. This acts as a digital footprint for diseases, food quality or environmental issues. The innovation combines biology, AI and nanotechnology.

Seismic Shift

Seismic Shift is an earthquake resilience research and development company. Its innovation integrates seismic damping systems into existing buildings (to strengthen them) while also allowing for extra weight from solar panels. This enhances the resilience of buildings for earthquakes and climate change.

Solid

Solid produces toothpaste in tablet and powder forms, packaged in returnable glass jars, to reduce plastic waste. It has saved 150,000 toothpaste tubes from landfill.

Solarferm

Solarferm creates sugar from sunlight, water, carbon dioxide and bacteria using precision fermentation. This technology reduces the cost and carbon footprint of sugar by eliminating land-intensive agriculture.

Solmech New Zealand

Solmech constructs solar farms, incorporating circular design, indigenous values and regenerative practices. It includes modular design for disassembly and reuse, and the company partners with local communities and iwi.

Starboard Maritime Intelligence

Starboard is a maritime intelligence platform designed to counter threats like illegal fishing and cable sabotage - protecting infrastructure and borders. It fuses multiple data sources with AI to create actionable insights in real time.

Steaddi

Steaddi makes biodegradable shoelaces from strong wool. The shoelaces, called Woo Lace, can dispose in three to four months, returning nutrients to the soil instead of contributing to landfill.

StrawSIPS

StrawSIPS are modular, structural panels made from compressed straw and timber. They deliver high insulation, breathability and air quality to buildings using affordable, natural, local, untreated materials.

The Franklin Energy Sharing Pilot

Ara Ake, Counties Energy and Climate Connect Aotearoa form The Franklin Energy Sharing Pilot. They are piloting organisations are piloting a new approach to locally shared solar energy. The mechanism will enable customers who are self-generating electricity to trade with, or gift to other customers.

The Plant Shake Company

The Plant Shake Company has created two oat-based shakes for the hospitality sector. They slash environmental impact and use less water than cow's milk shakes.

Trackgood

Trackgood is a digital platform that uses blockchain technology and AI to provide transparency and traceability in supply chains. This allows brands to record every step of a product's journey and share it with consumers.

Trow Group

Trow Group salvages construction materials, diverting at least 80% from landfill, to create homes, schools and community spaces across New Zealand and the Pacific. The company is driven by Māori and Pasifika leadership, integrating tikanga into onsite practices and creating employment pathways for Māori and Pasifika communities.

two/fiftyseven

two/fiftyseven is a climate-positive coworking and events space. The hub, created through circular design, enables more than 700 organisations to collaborate and take climate action. It has gifted almost $350,000 worth of space to changemakers.

Vitalize Sports Recovery

Vitalize Recovery Creams are an athlete-formulated range designed to elevate sports recovery. They are vegan and naturally moisturising.

Watersmart

Watersmart has created Porous Lane, a permeable pavement made with up to 60% New Zealand-recycled tyre rubber. It's up to 10 times more permeable than international guidelines and tackles urban stormwater issues through circular economy principles.

Whitehall Technical Services

Whitehall Technical Services has created a paint system that uses UV light to cure coatings, eliminating the need for solvents and preventing VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) from being released into the atmosphere.

With Wild

With Wild sources wild Wapiti venison in the Fiordland National Park for premium food products and uses the profits to support conservation. It partners with the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation.

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ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS NETWORK

The Sustainable Business Network (SBN) is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest sustainable business organisation, representing a diverse cross-section of the business and sustainability communities. We're at the forefront of change, driven by a vision of a world where people and nature prosper. We provide the tools, knowledge and connections needed to accelerate the shift to a sustainable future.

ABOUT TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAITAHA | UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

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Recognised in the top 100 universities worldwide for global impact and ranked in the top 20 for Sustainable Development Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities, UC empowers students to drive sustainable change through innovation, community engagement, and inclusive learning.

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