



Motu Kaikōura Trust AGM chair's report 2025/2026



This has been a year of go-forward progress.

Highlights of the Year

Undoubtedly the highlight of the year was the discovery on the island of the chevron skink / niho taniwha, underlining the success of our ongoing rat eradication programme. Motu Kaikōura is one of only three localities in the country where the chevron skink is known to exist. The year has seen a major effort on new track cutting by ranger Clint Stannard, expanding and intensifying our rat control network. Considerable pest plant work has also been undertaken by Clint in collaboration with Auckland Council especially with wilding pine control.

Infrastructure improvements include the installation of a new defibrillator at the wharf and rather splendid new signage (see above), designed by Shaun Lee and funded by the Aotearoa Great Barrier Local Board, has been installed at the wharf, airfield and Bradshaw Cove. Seabird audio attraction equipment was purchased from DOC and the necessary structures to support this was built by Clint last Spring and is now operational. Finally, just in time for this AGM the new work boat arrived on the island yesterday.

Our principle strategic goal remains the eradication of the last rat species (kiore) on Motu Kaikōura. Success in achieving this goal will be transformational. This May, index

monitoring for the May quarter, the end of the annual peak of the kiore population cycle, was 6% - the lowest percentage recorded for this quarter - equal to May 2020 which was at a time when the ship rat population was collapsing and before the kiore population had reached its peak.

- **Trap/bait station management**

Stations (bait & trap) have been serviced, monitored and maintained over the past year on a monthly basis with a winter pause of three months in July, August and September. During this period work was focused on extending and intensifying the network as set out in our strategic proposal to DOC of 2024.

- **Trap Network intensification and extension**

The network has been extended and intensified over the past year with 8 km of new tracks and 160 additional stations added;

- Two new lines cut in the 35ha intensification area (IMA) forming a 50m x 50m grid.
- A 75ha area adjacent to the IMA, designated (**Area 1**) multiple lines cut to form 100 x 50m grid with 51 stations added.
- The new Digger track line 17 stations added.
- Other pre-existing lines e.g. the Road line have had 11 stations added to create 50m spacing.

The number of rat bait/trap stations on the island now stands at 1016. This year we intend to increase this by 150 to take us over the theoretical 100 x 50m grid. Given the topography of the island we will need at least 1200 stations before we begin the planned final phase to attempt complete eradication.

- **Pest Plants (weed control)**

A large amount of pest plant control work has taken place this year thanks to dedicated funding from Auckland Council. This includes wilding pine control in Bradshaw's valley and around Mitre Peak; Low incidence weed control, including Moth Plant; site-led weed control of vasey grass, kikuyu, vetch, elephant ear, arum lily, periwinkle, blue corn lily and pampas. Some drone spraying of pampas was carried out on the cliffs facing Abercrombie Passage.

- **Airfield weed exclusion using transplanted flax**

In addition to normal Airfield mowing and gorse spraying, Clint and the Stannard girls, Xyra, Soren and Tazmyn have completed planting flax at approximately 1m intervals around the perimeter of the airfield. There has been a high survival rate in the transplanted flax. Flax seed was collected last autumn, raised in beds and bagged, and is being planted out this winter. More seed has been collected and sown for next year's planting.

- **Seabird Audio Attraction station**

Equipment assembled and the support structures built. The station is now permanently operating and now broadcasting winter-breeding grey-faced petrel calls.

- **Visitor interpretive panels**

Three visitor display board booths were built at Bradshaw's Cove, the Airfield and the Wharf by Clint. The booths provide a sturdy shelter for the new sign boards as noted.

The impressive Shaun Lee designed signs feature information about the island and highlighting our best walking tracks, and a QR code to our website have now been installed and we are already receiving positive reports from visitors (see graphic at the head of this report).

- **Service vessels**

During scheduled maintenance the outboard motor on the trust boat *Takapu* was found to have a blown head gasket. The Trust Board agreed that:

Firstly a smaller replacement boat be ordered as a work vessel to enable easier navigation and landings around the coast, reduce fuel costs and dependence on the larger *Takapu* which will now be reserved for transporting passengers and freight. This smart-looking new work boat funded by a generous donation from Pub Charity was built in Invercargill and has just arrived on the island. Special thanks to Harry Doig for managing this operation from beginning to end.

Secondly, the Trust sought and obtained funding from the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board for a replacement 60hp outboard motor to keep the larger boat operational.

- **Grants**

We have been very fortunate this year with successful grant applications.

Special thanks to our long-term partners Foundation North, The Lottery Heritage Grants Board, Pub Charity and the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board. Thanks to those trustees who volunteer much of their time preparing grants, David Gauld, Harry Doig and Michael Ngatai in particular.

- **Volunteer biological surveys**

Starting in December 2023, trustee and biologist Rosemary Barraclough has worked with volunteers to expand the late Mel Galbraith's annual bird count to include herpetology, entomology and botany. The group of skilled volunteers contributing to our December 2025 survey work was the same as per 2024. This included Peter Maddison (entomological survey, and updating species lists), Barbara Hughes (bird survey and conservation education), Trina Smith (bird survey and botanical ID), Ian McLean (bird survey), trustee David Gauld (bird survey), Brian Gill (bird and reptile survey) and Sean Clancy (moth survey).

In addition to this annual survey group we were also pleased to welcome a 15 member group from the Auckland Botanical Society in January. These natural scientists have added a significant amount to knowledge of the island's biodiversity.

- **Motu Kaikōura Management Biodiversity Plan 2025-2035**

An updated replacement for the Biodiversity Management Plan has been on the work list for some five years. Over the past year with the help of Rosemary Barraclough I have updated the plan. The new plan also incorporates the remarkable all species list compiled by Peter Maddison as an appendix. After the plan was reviewed and signed off in-principle by the Trust Board I asked botanist Ewen Cameron, zoologist Brian Gill and council pest plant expert Niklas Erikson to review it and they have added valuable further advice and information. Ewen Cameron who first surveyed the island in 1995 & Maureen Young of the Auckland Botanical Society have also given us their latest botanical species list for inclusion as well. Trust secretary David Gauld has undertaken proof-reading and some editing. The Biodiversity Management Plan is now up on our website. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

- **Communications**

Apart from our website: <https://motukaikoura.org> our main communication approach is via our popular *Kaka Comments* newsletter and the annual Motu Kaikoura Rat Management Programme Progress Report. The latter provides detailed, scientifically useful data. Both are distributed to a steadily expanding database.

- **Stakeholder relations**

I am pleased to report our relations with key stakeholders are in good shape with several in-person meetings with DOC's new Auckland operations manager Alex Rogers and Aotea operations manager Fletcher Beazley especially. Fletcher is also the chair of the Ngāti Rehua – Ngāti Wai ki Aotea Trust Board and is our go-to person for our longstanding relationship with tangata whenua.

There has been increasing recognition and support from Auckland Council environmental services notably from regional biosecurity manager Jonathan Miles, Great Barrier biosecurity manager Jeremy Warden and conservation adviser Niklas Erikson. Over past year we had visits from the council weed monitoring team and four visits from the Department of Conservation including those led by Fletcher and Alex.

We are especially grateful for the help given the Trust over recent years by the Aotea Great Barrier Local Board and staff led by Board chair Izzy Fordham

- **Supporters and volunteers**

Thanks are due to key supporters and technical specialists who assist our work especially our accounting adviser Kim Grove. Also we receive valued legal advice from Rupert Wilson, plus technical assistance from Auckland Council GIS manager Cat Boyes and team and scientific advice from Ewen Cameron and Brian Gill and finally vital logistic support from Sam Gambling Biosecurity ranger in charge of DOC's Fleet Street depot who manages all the equipment and supplies shipped to the island on the *Hauturu*.

Final thanks...

Once again my thanks to the valued support of deputy chair Michael Ngatai who represents the Motu Kaikoura Trust at regular Gulf Island Trust meetings. Treasurer Harry Doig and secretary David Gault and to Trustees Rosemary Barraclough, Chris Ollivier and Youth Trustee Xyra Stannard (the person who discovered the chevron skink) for their team work and unpaid contributions to Trust governance and administration, preparing grant applications and arranging purchases and delivery of equipment and supplies. All our work is voluntary and unpaid.

Mike Lee
Chairperson
11 June 2026

