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PROGRAMME



What Enables Enduring Place-Based Rural Governance in Aotearoa New Zealand?

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1. Executive summary

Rural communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand face increasing governance challenges, including leadership succession, ageing governance cohorts, increasing compliance requirements, and changing community expectations. Understanding what enables governance to endure is therefore important for the long-term wellbeing of rural communities and the places they serve.

This study explored the question: **What Enables Enduring Place-Based Rural Governance in Aotearoa New Zealand?** Using a qualitative case study approach, it examined lessons from the past, insights from the present, and opportunities for the future through historical and contemporary examples including Reverend Richard Davis, Hōne Heke Pōkai, Sir James Carroll, Sir Āpirana Ngata, Whāngārā Farms, and Project Parore.

Five interrelated characteristics consistently emerged:

- Strong connections to place and community create stewardship, belonging, and collective responsibility.
- Trusted relationships built on mutual respect enable governance to withstand change while maintaining shared purpose.
- Consistent leadership behaviours strengthen credibility, culture, and long-term commitment.
- Intergenerational stewardship, mentoring, and succession ensure knowledge, values, and capability are transferred across generations.
- Adaptability, supported by a clear sense of purpose, enables governance to respond to changing circumstances while remaining focused on long-term outcomes.

One of the most significant findings was that the mechanisms for building trust appear to have changed remarkably little despite almost 200 years of social, political, and technological change. While governance systems continue to evolve, trust continues to be built through relationships, shared experiences, mutual respect, and long-term commitment.

The research found that enduring governance is rarely the result of individual achievement alone. Rather, it emerges through the cumulative efforts of people working together over time. Importantly, enduring governance is not the absence of disagreement; it is the ability to preserve relationships despite disagreement.

Succession emerged as one of the greatest challenges facing rural governance. The study recommends investing earlier in leadership development, strengthening governance pathways, prioritising succession and knowledge transfer, encouraging long-term thinking, and recognising relationships as a strategic governance asset.

This report concludes that enduring place-based rural governance is about more than maintaining governance structures. It is about stewarding purpose, strengthening trusted relationships, reinforcing connections to place, developing future leaders, and ensuring governance capability continues to serve communities across generations.

Enduring governance is the act of caring for something deeply enough that others continue to care for it long after you are gone.

2. Acknowledgements

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A special thank you to Project Parore, particularly Chair David Peters, Deputy Chair Karen Smillie, the Board of Trustees, and the wider team for supporting my participation in the programme. Your encouragement and belief in the value of leadership development made this journey possible.

I would also like to acknowledge the Davis family, both past and present, whose long connection to place, farming, and community helped inspire the direction of this research. To my father, Ian Davis, and my uncle, Roger Davis, for their encouragement and financial contribution towards the costs of completing the programme through Pukekiwi Station.

I would also like to acknowledge my grandfather, Ron Davis. While he is no longer here to read this report, I suspect he would be wondering why I was spending so much time writing about rural leadership and governance instead of building a fence or getting on with a practical job back at home on the farm. In many ways, however, the values he lived by—hard work, commitment to place, helping others, and leaving things better than you found them—have influenced this research as much as any book, journal article, or case study.

Thank you to Hayden Swann and Whāngārā Farms for granting permission to reference *He Rau Ake Ake*. The opportunity to learn from this long-term vision provided valuable insights into stewardship, partnerships, and intergenerational thinking.

To my fellow members of Kellogg Cohort 55, thank you for your friendship, challenge, humour, and support throughout the journey. Let's keep in touch on the journey ahead.

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to my beautiful wife, Sarah, and our children, Harvey and Poppy. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and unwavering support. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you for always standing beside me as we look to the future together.

3. Introduction

Rural New Zealand has always relied on people willing to build relationships, contribute to their communities, and invest in the wellbeing of future generations. Across generations, these individuals have helped navigate periods of significant change, including land development, environmental challenges, economic uncertainty, and evolving social expectations. While much attention is often given to leadership during moments of crisis or transformation, less attention is paid to what enables governance to endure over time.

This report explores the concept of enduring place-based rural governance in Aotearoa New Zealand. It considers the factors that enable leaders, organisations, and communities to remain effective, trusted, and connected over extended periods of time. Understanding what enables governance to endure may be just as important as understanding how to lead.

Central to this study is the proposition that enduring governance is deeply influenced by place. This is the concept of place-based governance. Strong connections to local communities, landscapes, histories, and cultures shape leadership, strengthen relationships, and influence decision-making over time. This report explores how these place-based connections contribute to governance that endures across generations.

Place provides more than a physical location; it shapes identity, relationships, shared history, local knowledge, and a long-term sense of responsibility. Together, these characteristics influence how trust is built, how decisions are made, and how governance remains relevant, resilient, and trusted over time.

The report adopts a past, present, and future lens. It examines historical examples of leadership and governance, considers contemporary challenges and opportunities facing rural communities, and reflects on what may be required to sustain governance capability into the future. Attention is given to the role of connection to place, relationships, trust, adaptability, stewardship, and intergenerational thinking contribute to enduring place-based rural governance.

My interest in this topic comes from both personal and professional experience. I am involved with a family sheep and beef station near Motu in the eastern North Island and work as General Manager of Project Parore, a community-led environmental organisation operating in the Bay of Plenty. Through these experiences, I work alongside farmers, hapū, volunteers, trustees, funders, and local government representatives who are all striving to create positive outcomes for the places they care about.

Increasingly, I have become interested in the individuals and governance groups that continue to make meaningful contributions over decades rather than years. Some leaders appear able to maintain trust, influence, and community support through changing circumstances, difficult conversations, and periods of adversity, while others struggle despite having similar resources and opportunities. This observation led me to explore the concept of enduring place-based rural governance.

For the purposes of this study, enduring governance refers to the ability of leaders, organisations, and communities to maintain effective relationships, decision-making capacity, and collective purpose over extended periods of time. Enduring governance is not simply about longevity. Rather, it is about remaining relevant, trusted, adaptable, and connected to the people and places being served. As the research progressed, it became apparent that longevity alone was only part of the story. The most influential leaders

continued to shape people, communities, and decision-making long after their direct involvement had ended.

Aotearoa New Zealand provides a unique context in which to examine this concept. Māori and Pākehā leadership traditions have evolved alongside one another for more than 180 years, creating examples of governance that have succeeded, adapted, and sometimes failed. Historical figures such as Sir Āpirana Ngata, Hōne Heke Pōkai, Sir James Carroll, and Reverend Richard Davis provide valuable insights into leadership, relationships, stewardship, and service (Orange, 2012) (Walker, 2001). Their experiences highlight the importance of trust, adaptability, long-term commitment, and a deep connection to people and place. While the social, political, and economic environments they operated within differ from those of today, many of the challenges they faced remain relevant.

One of the more surprising observations emerging from this research was that the process of building trust appears remarkably unchanged despite almost 200 years of social, political, and technological change. While governance structures, communication methods, and organisational complexity have evolved considerably, the foundations of trust continue to be built through relationships, shared experiences, mutual respect, and time spent together. This insight became a recurring theme throughout the research and helped shape the direction of the study. Together, these observations suggest that while the context of governance continues to evolve, the human behaviours that sustain it may remain fundamentally unchanged.

4. Aim

The aim of this report is to identify the factors that enable enduring place-based rural governance in Aotearoa New Zealand and to explore how organisational purpose, trusted relationships, connection to place, and future leadership can be strengthened and sustained across generations.

5. Objectives

This study sought to:

1. Explore historical examples of leadership, relationships, and governance that have endured over time.
2. Examine contemporary rural governance practices, challenges, and opportunities within community, environmental, farming, and Māori organisations.
3. Identify the factors that contribute to enduring place-based rural governance, including connection to place, trust, relationships, leadership behaviours, adaptability, and intergenerational stewardship.
4. Explore how leadership, stewardship, and succession contribute to enduring place-based rural governance through the transfer of knowledge, relationships, values, and leadership capability across generations.
5. Develop recommendations to strengthen enduring place-based rural governance and build future governance capability in Aotearoa New Zealand.

6. Literature review

6.1 What is Governance?

Governance is commonly defined as the systems, processes, and relationships through which organisations and communities are directed, controlled, and held accountable. While management is concerned with day-to-day operations, governance focuses on setting direction, making strategic decisions, managing risk, and ensuring long-term sustainability (Kōkiri, 2023)

Within New Zealand, governance is often described as stewardship. Rather than simply exercising authority, governance involves acting in the long-term interests of people, communities, assets, and future generations. This perspective is particularly relevant within rural communities where leaders are often responsible for balancing economic, environmental, social, and cultural outcomes over extended periods of time (Community Governance Aotearoa, 2024).

Contemporary governance literature highlights that effective governance relies on more than formal structures, policies, and compliance processes. Relationships, trust, shared purpose, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances are increasingly recognised as critical components of successful governance systems (Horlings, 2018). In rural settings, governance frequently occurs through networks of individuals, organisations, iwi, landowners, and community groups working together to address local challenges and opportunities.

For Māori, governance is often closely linked to concepts such as kaitiakitanga (guardianship), whakapapa (relationships and connections), and collective responsibility. These perspectives emphasise intergenerational stewardship and the importance of making decisions that contribute to the wellbeing of future generations rather than focusing solely on short-term outcomes (Kōkiri, 2023).

For this research, governance is defined as the processes, relationships, behaviours, and leadership practices that enable communities and organisations to make decisions, manage resources, and work collectively towards long-term outcomes. For the purposes of this research, governance extends beyond formal structures to include the leadership behaviours, relationships, stewardship, and community connections that contribute to enduring place-based rural governance in Aotearoa New Zealand.

6.2 Place, Belonging and Relationships

Connection to place refers to the emotional, cultural, social, and physical bonds people develop with a particular location. Leaders with strong connections to place are more likely to invest time, effort, and leadership into the long-term wellbeing of their communities. Place-based approaches recognise that local history, culture, environment, and relationships influence decision-making and development outcomes.

(Horlings, 2018) highlights the importance of place leadership in rural development, arguing that leaders who are deeply connected to their communities are often better positioned to mobilise collective action and respond to local challenges. Place-based leadership is characterised by a strong understanding of local context, an ability to build relationships, and a commitment to the long-term wellbeing of a community.

Research also highlights the importance of social capital and trust within rural communities. Relationships developed over time create the networks and goodwill necessary for collaboration, collective action, and community resilience. Trust enables people to work together despite differing perspectives and provides a foundation for enduring governance arrangements (Putnam, 2018).

6.3 Stewardship, Leadership and Adaptability

Stewardship is commonly understood as the responsible management of resources, relationships, and opportunities on behalf of others and future generations. Governance literature increasingly emphasises stewardship as a key leadership responsibility, particularly in environments characterised by uncertainty, complexity, and change (Community Governance Aotearoa, 2024).

Effective leaders must balance immediate operational demands with long-term strategic thinking. Adaptive leadership theory suggests that successful leaders continually learn, respond to changing circumstances, and adjust their approaches while maintaining a clear sense of purpose (Heifetz, 2009). Within rural communities, leadership often relies less on formal authority than on influence, credibility, service, and the ability to build consensus. (Horlings, 2018) argues that effective place-based leadership emerges through strong connections between people, place, and local networks, enabling communities to respond collectively to complex rural challenges.

These leadership characteristics are reinforced by governance literature. (Ostrom, 1990) argues that enduring institutions depend on trust, reciprocity, participation, and shared responsibility among those managing common resources. Similarly, (Gash, 2008) identify trust-building, shared understanding, face-to-face dialogue, and commitment as essential conditions for effective collaborative governance. Collectively, the literature suggests that stewardship, adaptive leadership, trusted relationships, and collaboration strengthen governance capability and improve the capacity of organisations to respond to change over time.

These concepts are particularly relevant to rural governance, where many environmental, social, and economic challenges require sustained collaboration over long periods. The literature therefore provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how stewardship, leadership, adaptability, and collaboration contribute to the long-term effectiveness rural governance.

6.4 Intergenerational Thinking and Succession

A recurring theme throughout the governance literature is the importance of intergenerational thinking. Sustainable governance requires leaders to consider the long-term implications of decisions and to invest in the wellbeing of future generations (Kōkiri, 2023).

Succession planning is also recognised as a critical component of governance durability. Leadership capability cannot remain with a small number of individuals but must be intentionally developed and transferred to emerging leaders. Research suggests that organisations and communities that invest in leadership development are more resilient and better positioned to sustain momentum through periods of change (Kellerman, 2012).

Intergenerational stewardship involves more than replacing leaders. It includes the transfer of knowledge, values, relationships, and governance capability between generations. This process helps maintain continuity while allowing governance systems to adapt and evolve over time (Kellerman, 2012). The durability of governance may therefore depend not only on the quality of current leadership, but also on the ability to prepare and support future generations of leaders (Kōkiri, 2023).

6.5 Case study:

Reverend Richard Davis and Chief Hōne Heke



Figure 1. Artistic representation of Reverend Richard Davis and Hōne Heke Pōkai created using AI-assisted image reconstruction from historical source images.

Source: Author-generated image using ChatGPT (OpenAI), based on historical photographs and portraits (2026).

When examining historical examples of enduring place-based leadership and governance in Aotearoa New Zealand, the relationship between Reverend Richard Davis and Ngāpuhi rangatira Hōne Heke Pōkai provides a compelling case study. While originating from different cultures and worldviews, the two men developed an enduring relationship founded on trust, mutual respect, shared experiences, and a common Christian faith (Orange, 2012).

Arriving in New Zealand in 1824, Richard Davis spent much of his life serving as a missionary in Northland, particularly at Waimate North and later Kaikohe. A farmer by trade, missionary by vocation, and observer by nature, Davis demonstrated a level of consistency and discipline that became a defining characteristic of his leadership. He maintained detailed daily records of weather conditions, recording temperature, atmospheric pressure, wind direction, cloud cover, and significant weather events. He was also a prolific writer, producing letters

and journals documenting the natural environment, social conditions, and interactions between Māori and European settlers (Taonga H. N., 2025).

These records are recognised among New Zealand's earliest continuous written observations and demonstrate a systematic approach to observation, reflection, learning, and long-term thinking. Viewed through a contemporary lens, Davis's habits reflect many of the characteristics associated with enduring leadership. His commitment to recording observations, maintaining routines, and continually seeking to understand both people and place enabled him to build deep local knowledge and strong relationships over time. His leadership was not characterised by authority alone, but by consistency, service, humility, and a willingness to remain committed to a place and its people over many decades (Binney, 2007).

One of the most significant relationships that Davis developed was with Hōne Heke Pōkai. While the exact date of their first meeting is unclear, the two men are believed to have known one another for approximately twenty-five years. During this period, they experienced significant social, cultural, and political change, including the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, increasing tensions between Māori and the Crown, and the events that led to the Northern War (Orange, 2012).

Despite these challenges, the relationship between Davis and Heke endured. During the period leading up to conflict, Davis chose to move his family to Kaikohe despite concerns for their safety. He later recorded that Heke had shown continued respect towards the mission family and had "not been unmindful of us", highlighting a level of trust that had been developed over many years (Rogers, 1973). Historical accounts suggest that Heke's grievances were directed primarily towards Crown actions and policies rather than individual missionaries, allowing relationships such as that with Davis to continue despite wider political tensions (Orange, 2012).

Viewed through the lens of enduring place-based governance, the Davis–Heke relationship demonstrates the importance of investing in relationships before they are needed. Trust was not established during times of conflict but developed gradually through years of regular interaction, shared experiences, mutual respect, and commitment to place. The relationship endured because it was built on a foundation stronger than agreement on individual issues.

The case also highlights the value of consistency, daily habits, and long-term commitment. Davis remained embedded within the community for decades, allowing trust, credibility, and local knowledge to develop over time. His disciplined routines of recording weather observations, maintaining journals, writing letters, and reflecting on daily events created a detailed understanding of both people and place (Waimate North Mission House, 2025) (Rogers, *The early journals of Henry Williams and William Williams, 1826–1840*, 1973). These habits demonstrate a commitment to observation, learning, and continuous engagement. Viewed through a contemporary lens, they reflect many of the behaviours associated with effective leadership, including reflection, communication, accountability, and informed decision-making (Northouse, 2022).

Together, the examples of Davis and Heke suggest that enduring governance is often less about formal structures and more about the quality of relationships, the consistency of behaviour, and the willingness to remain engaged through periods of challenge and disagreement. Their experiences highlight the enduring importance of trust, connection, and commitment to people and place.

Importantly, the relationship between Davis and Heke demonstrates that enduring relationships do not necessarily depend on agreement. The two men experienced significant political and cultural tensions during their lifetimes, yet they continued to engage with one

another. Their relationship appears to have been built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to maintaining connection despite disagreement. This ability to preserve relationships through difficult circumstances remains highly relevant to contemporary governance, where complex issues often require people with differing perspectives to continue working together toward shared outcomes.

6.6 Case study:

Sir James Carroll and Sir Āpirana Ngata

An important aspect of Sir Āpirana Ngata's leadership development was his relationship with Sir James Carroll, one of the most influential Māori political leaders of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carroll was the first Māori elected to a general electorate seat in the New Zealand Parliament and later became Native Minister and twice Acting Prime Minister. Throughout his political career, Carroll sought to create greater opportunities for Māori participation within national governance while maintaining strong connections to Māori communities (Soutar, 2013) (History, 2025).

Ngata's entry into national leadership was closely linked to Carroll. During the early 1900s, Ngata worked alongside Carroll on initiatives designed to increase Māori involvement in governance and local decision-making. He assisted in the development and implementation of the Māori Lands Administration Act 1900 and the Māori Councils Act 1900, legislation that sought to provide Māori with a greater role in managing their own affairs. Through this work, Ngata gained first-hand experience in policy development, administration, and governance at both local and national levels (Walker, 2001).

The Māori Councils Act established elected Māori councils with responsibilities relating to community wellbeing, health, and local administration. Ngata became chairman of the Horouta District Māori Council on the East Coast and later served as an organising inspector working with councils throughout the country. These roles exposed him to the practical realities of governance, including leadership, accountability, decision-making, and community engagement. Rather than simply observing from the sidelines, Ngata was entrusted with meaningful responsibility and opportunities to develop his governance capability (Walker, 2001).

Viewed through the lens of enduring place-based governance, the significance of the Carroll–Ngata relationship lies in the deliberate transfer of leadership capability between generations. Carroll did not simply lead; he created opportunities for Ngata to learn, contribute, and assume increasing responsibility. Through this process, governance knowledge, political experience, and leadership networks were passed from one generation to the next (Walker, 2001).

This relationship highlights an important theme emerging from this research. Enduring governance depends not only on the quality of current leaders, but also on the existence of pathways that enable future leaders to gain experience and develop capability. Carroll's investment in Ngata helped create continuity of leadership beyond his own lifetime. Ngata would later build upon this foundation through his contributions to Māori land development, cultural revitalisation, education, and community advancement, demonstrating how leadership development can generate benefits that endure across generations.

Contemporary examples

I have completed comparisons between Project Parore a Bay of Plenty Catchment group & Whāngārā Farms which is owned and managed as a partnership of three Māori Incorporations, with each retaining ownership of their land while participating in the joint farm operations (Whangara Farms Case Study, 2016).



Figure 2: Project Parore Board members mixed in with Project Parore operations staff 2025

6.7 Case study:

Project Parore

Project Parore is a community-led catchment group based in Katikati, Bay of Plenty, focused on improving biodiversity and water quality through collaborative environmental stewardship. Governance has played a leading role in developing and refining the organisation's long-term development through strategic planning, board oversight, and a commitment to balancing immediate operational priorities with longer-term environmental and community outcomes. In 2025, the organisation adopted a five-year strategic plan, replacing its previous three-year planning horizon and signalling a greater emphasis on organisational sustainability and long-term thinking (Parore, 2026).

While modest compared with the 100-year vision outlined in Whāngārā Farms' *He Rau Ake Ake* plan (Whāngārā, 2025) (Figures 3 and 4), the strategy reflects a deliberate commitment to looking beyond immediate operational pressures and considering the future needs of the organisation, the community, and the catchments it serves.

The strategy was developed during a period of significant funding uncertainty, requiring the Board to balance short-term organisational pressures with long-term aspirations. Governance discussions continued to consider organisational resilience, succession, future opportunities, and the long-term health of the catchments and communities supported by Project Parore (Parore, 2026).

Governance workshops delivered through the Bay Conservation Alliance further highlighted the importance of governance capability, leadership renewal, and succession planning within community-led organisations (BCA, 2026). Discussions identified common challenges across the sector, including an ageing governance cohort, increasing compliance expectations, and limited opportunities for emerging leaders to gain governance experience before it is required.

A notable feature of Project Parore's governance has been its emphasis on clear governance processes, accurate record keeping, transparent decision-making, and maintaining a clear distinction between governance and operational responsibilities. Together, these practices support organisational continuity, preserve institutional knowledge, and strengthen governance capability as the organisation continues to evolve.



Figure 3 and 4: The front covers of Project Parore's 5-year strategic plan alongside Whāngārā Farms 100-year whenua optimisation plan

6.8 Case study: Whāngārā Farms

Whāngārā Farms provides a contemporary example of enduring place-based governance operating at an intergenerational scale. Located north of Gisborne, the incorporation manages whenua on behalf of its owners and descendants, balancing cultural, environmental, social, and economic aspirations. Like many Māori land entities, Whāngārā Farms faces the challenge of making decisions that meet the needs of the present while protecting opportunities for future generations (Whāngārā, 2025).

In 2025, Whāngārā Farms launched *He Rau Ake Ake*, a 100-year Whenua Optimisation Plan described as a pioneering long-term vision integrating cultural heritage, productivity, biodiversity, climate resilience, emissions reduction, and whānau wellbeing within a single framework for decision-making (NZHerald, 2025). The plan identifies more than 200 projects across the next century and provides a roadmap for balancing environmental restoration, economic performance, and cultural aspirations over multiple generations.

The scale and ambition of the plan are significant, but perhaps more significant is what it represents from a governance perspective. Developing a 100-year vision requires leaders willing to think beyond annual budgets, election cycles, individual careers, and even their own lifetimes. It requires governance that recognises their role not simply as decision-makers for the present, but as stewards acting on behalf of future generations.

A defining feature of the Whāngārā Farms approach is the integration of tikanga Māori and scientific knowledge. Rather than viewing cultural values, environmental outcomes, and economic performance as competing priorities, *He Rau Ake Ake* seeks to bring them together within a shared framework for decision-making. Board Chair Hayden Swann describes the plan as an example of tikanga and science working in harmony to create a long-term vision for the whenua and future generations (NZHerald, 2025). This reflects a governance philosophy that recognises the interconnected relationship between people, land, environment, culture, and community wellbeing.

The development of the plan also highlights the importance of relationships and shared kaupapa. The launch of *He Rau Ake Ake* brought together whānau, shareholders, trustees, partners, and community representatives to walk the whenua, share kōrero, and reflect collectively on the future direction of the incorporation (NZHerald, 2025). The process itself demonstrates that enduring governance is not simply about producing strategic plans. It is about building shared understanding, maintaining relationships, and creating collective ownership of a long-term vision.

Another noteworthy aspect of the Whāngārā Farms approach has been its willingness to openly share the plan and the thinking behind it. Many organisations may choose to keep such significant strategic work confidential. Instead, Whāngārā Farms has actively encouraged others to learn from its experience, openly sharing its vision with external organisations, governance groups, and communities. This openness reflects a leadership approach grounded in shared kaupapa and collective benefit rather than organisational self-interest.

Viewed through a governance lens, this willingness to share the plan demonstrates confidence in both the vision and the governance process used to develop it. More importantly, it recognises that strengthening governance capability beyond a single organisation contributes to stronger rural governance more broadly. By making its

governance approach visible and accessible, Whāngārā Farms encourages learning, supports the development of governance capability, and provides a practical example that other organisations can adapt to their own circumstances. Rather than treating governance knowledge as a competitive advantage, it treats governance as a collective responsibility in which the success of one organisation can strengthen the capability of many. This reflects stewardship in practice, where investing in the governance capability of others contributes to more resilient communities, stronger institutions, and more enduring governance across generations.

The case also highlights the importance of long-term thinking. Many organisations struggle to plan beyond annual budgets or three-year strategic cycles. Whāngārā Farms has deliberately challenged this convention by asking what the whenua, whānau, and wider community may need not only in the next decade, but over the next century. While no organisation can accurately predict the future, the discipline of planning over such an extended timeframe encourages leaders to move beyond immediate operational priorities and consider the long-term consequences of today's decisions. In doing so, the planning process itself becomes an exercise in stewardship, succession, and intergenerational governance, helping ensure that decisions made today continue to benefit future generations.

Perhaps most importantly, the Whāngārā Farms case demonstrates that enduring governance is ultimately about continuity. A vision extending across one hundred years cannot be delivered by a single board, chief executive, or generation of leaders. Its success depends on the ability to transfer knowledge, relationships, values, governance capability, and aspirations from one generation to the next.

In this respect, the durability of the governance system may prove more important than the durability of the plan itself. Plans provide direction, but governance systems provide continuity. A well-designed governance system enables leadership succession, preserves institutional knowledge, maintains organisational purpose, and provides the capacity to adapt to changing social, environmental, economic, and political conditions without losing sight of long-term aspirations. Ultimately, it is the strength of the governance system—not the longevity of individual leaders or strategic plans—that determines whether a long-term vision can be realised across generations.

Viewed through the lens of this research, Whāngārā Farms illustrates many of the characteristics associated with enduring place-based governance. Strong connections to place, a shared kaupapa, long-term commitment, intergenerational thinking, and a willingness to invest in relationships have all contributed to the development of an ambitious vision for the future. Like the historical examples examined in this report, the case suggests that enduring governance is strengthened when leaders are willing to think beyond themselves and act in service of future generations. Whāngārā Farms welcomes ongoing collaboration as the kaupapa progresses over the next century. (Whāngārā, 2025)

7. Method

This study used a qualitative case study approach to explore the factors that enable enduring place-based rural governance in Aotearoa New Zealand. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand how leadership, relationships, stewardship, and governance contribute to enduring governance over time. Rather than measuring or quantifying governance outcomes, the study sought to explore the concepts, experiences, and recurring characteristics that underpin enduring place-based rural governance.

A past, present, and future framework was adopted to examine how enduring leadership and governance have emerged, evolved, and been sustained over time. Historical case studies involving Reverend Richard Davis, Hōne Heke Pōkai, Sir James Carroll, and Sir Āpirana Ngata were examined alongside contemporary examples including Project Parore and Whāngārā Farms. These case studies were selected because they demonstrated characteristics relevant to the research question, including long-term leadership, enduring relationships, strong connections to place, intergenerational influence, and evidence of governance or stewardship over extended periods. While the number of case studies was intentionally limited, the selected examples provided rich, place-based insights across different historical periods, leadership contexts, and organisational settings, allowing recurring governance themes to be identified and compared.

The research drew upon published literature, historical records, biographies, strategic plans, governance resources, organisational documents, and publicly available reports. Information from these sources was compared to identify recurring ideas, common themes, and differences across the historical and contemporary case studies. These observations informed the findings and discussion presented in this report.

The purpose of this study was not to test hypotheses or produce statistically generalisable findings. Rather, it sought to develop a deeper understanding of the factors that appear to support enduring place-based rural governance and to identify insights that may be relevant to rural communities, organisations, and future governance practice throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

Artificial intelligence (AI), specifically ChatGPT, was used during the preparation of this report to assist with brainstorming, refining written expression, improving report structure, identifying relevant literature, and supporting the editing process. AI was not used to generate original findings, undertake independent analysis, or draw conclusions. All case study selection, interpretation, findings, discussion, recommendations, and conclusions remain the work of the author.

8. Findings

The historical and contemporary examples examined in this research revealed several common characteristics associated with enduring place-based rural governance. While the contexts differed considerably, many of the underlying themes remained remarkably consistent across time.

Strong Connections to Place and Community

Across both historical and contemporary examples, enduring leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to a particular place, community, or kaupapa. This commitment often extended across decades rather than years. Leaders such as Reverend Richard Davis, Hōne Heke Pōkai, Sir Āpirana Ngata, and contemporary rural governance leaders maintained deep connections to the people and places they served. These connections appeared to strengthen trust, credibility, local knowledge, and long-term commitment, creating foundations that could be sustained across generations.

The findings suggest that place is more than a physical location. It provides a shared identity, purpose, and sense of responsibility that supports collective action and encourages long-term stewardship of both communities and landscapes.

Relationships Remain the Foundation of Enduring Governance

One of the most significant findings was the central role of relationships. Prior to undertaking this research, I expected to find meaningful differences between historical and contemporary examples of leadership and governance. Instead, the process of building trust appeared remarkably consistent despite almost two centuries of social, political, economic, and technological change.

Across both historical and contemporary examples, enduring governance was underpinned by trusted relationships developed over time through regular interaction, shared experiences, mutual respect, honest communication, and a willingness to understand different perspectives. While governance structures, reporting requirements, and communication technologies have evolved considerably, the human foundations of trust appear largely unchanged.

The relationship between Reverend Richard Davis and Hōne Heke Pōkai provides a compelling historical example. Despite significant political disagreement and the conflict associated with the Northern War, their relationship endured for more than two decades.

Their experience suggests that enduring governance is not characterised by the absence of disagreement, but by relationships that are sufficiently strong to withstand disagreement while maintaining trust, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to the future.

Similar themes emerged across the contemporary case studies. Whether through catchment groups, environmental initiatives, incorporations, trusts, governance boards, or community organisations, relationships consistently enabled collective action. Long-term trust between trustees, landowners, hapū, funders, volunteers, and community members frequently emerged as a critical factor supporting **organisational endurance**.

The findings suggest that relationships should be viewed as a governance asset rather than a by-product of governance activity. Trust, credibility, and social capital are often established long before they are required and frequently determine how effectively organisations respond during periods of uncertainty, conflict, leadership transition, or change. While

governance frameworks, funding models, organisational structures, and communication technologies continue to evolve, the ability to build and maintain genuine relationships remains fundamental to enduring governance.

Consistent Leadership Behaviours and Habits Matter

A recurring theme throughout the research was the importance of consistent leadership behaviours and habits. Richard Davis's journals, weather observations, correspondence, and decades of service demonstrate the value of observation, reflection, learning, and long-term commitment. Similarly, contemporary leaders highlighted the importance of strategic thinking, preparation, relationship management, and ongoing engagement.

The findings suggest that enduring leadership is rarely built through isolated achievements. Rather, credibility, trust, and influence are developed through repeated behaviours, consistent decision-making, and a sustained commitment to serving communities over time.

Governance Capability is Developed Over Time

Few examples identified clear or formal pathways into governance. Instead, governance capability was most often developed through participation in community organisations, farming groups, trusts, environmental initiatives, voluntary organisations, and local leadership roles.

The relationship between Sir James Carroll and Sir Āpirana Ngata illustrates how governance capability can be intentionally developed through mentoring, observation, increasing responsibility, and practical experience. Governance capability appeared to develop progressively rather than through formal training alone.

Succession Remains a Significant Challenge

Many rural organisations continue to rely heavily on a relatively small number of highly committed individuals. While examples of successful leadership development were identified, succession planning often appeared informal and dependent upon personal relationships.

The findings suggest that without deliberate investment in emerging leaders, valuable knowledge, relationships, governance capability, and community trust risk being lost when experienced leaders retire or step aside. The intentional transfer of governance capability appears to be critical for maintaining organisational continuity and supporting enduring governance.

Adaptability Supports Enduring Governance

Long-serving leaders and organisations demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing social, economic, environmental, and political conditions while maintaining a clear sense of purpose. Rather than resisting change, enduring leaders responded to new challenges while remaining anchored to their core values and objectives.

The findings suggest that adaptability is a defining characteristic of enduring governance. Leaders who balance continuity with innovation appear better able to respond to changing circumstances while sustaining long-term community confidence and organisational effectiveness.

9. Discussion

One of the most significant insights emerging from this research is that the primary purpose of governance extends beyond overseeing organisational performance or making decisions for today. At its core, governance exists to ensure that an organisation's purpose, relationships, knowledge, and capability endure beyond the individuals who currently hold leadership roles. Its role is to preserve what matters, develop those who follow, and ensure that organisational capability is continually renewed across generations.

This pattern was evident across both the historical and contemporary case studies. Reverend Richard Davis did more than provide leadership during his lifetime. Through decades of journals, correspondence, observations, and relationship building, he created a lasting record of knowledge, values, and leadership that continued to influence others long after his death. Similarly, Sir James Carroll's greatest contribution may not simply have been his own political leadership, but his deliberate mentoring and development of Sir Āpirana Ngata, demonstrating that one of governance's most enduring responsibilities is to prepare those who will lead next.

The contemporary examples reveal the same pattern. Whāngārā Farms' 100-year plan is significant not because it predicts the future, but because it creates a governance framework capable of guiding successive generations of governors. Likewise, Project Parore's five-year strategy, developed during a period of considerable funding uncertainty, illustrates that effective governance continues to invest in organisational purpose, succession, and long-term capability even while responding to immediate operational challenges. Although differing in scale and planning horizons, both organisations demonstrate that governance is fundamentally about creating continuity between generations rather than simply directing current operations.

Viewed through this lens, governance can be understood as the institutionalisation of leadership over time. Leaders develop trust, relationships, values, direction, organisational culture, and a deep connection to place through their actions and decisions. Governance preserves and transfers these contributions through strategic planning, stewardship, documentation, mentoring, shared decision-making, and succession planning, transforming individual leadership into enduring organisational capability. In this sense, governance enables leadership to outlive the individual by ensuring that knowledge, relationships, values, organisational purpose, and connection to place are carried forward to future generations.

This perspective also explains why governance systems matter. Too often they are viewed primarily as compliance requirements or administrative processes. However, the findings from this research suggest they serve a much deeper purpose. Governance systems preserve institutional knowledge, strengthen organisational memory, reinforce connections to people and place, foster leadership renewal, and reduce dependence on individual leaders. They enable organisations to retain their purpose while adapting to changing circumstances, ensuring that new governors inherit not only responsibility for the organisation, but also the knowledge, relationships, values, stewardship, and understanding of place required to continue its kaupapa.

This research therefore suggests that the true measure of governance is not simply whether an organisation performs well today, but whether it intentionally prepares itself to remain effective tomorrow. Governance succeeds when each generation leaves behind stronger relationships, stronger systems, greater governance capability, deeper connections to place, and clearer organisational purpose than it inherited. In this respect, governance is not simply the oversight of organisations; it is the deliberate stewardship of organisational purpose, relationships, and place across generations.

Enduring place-based rural governance is not created by the longevity of individual leaders, but by governance systems that deliberately preserve organisational purpose, sustain trusted relationships, strengthen connections to place, develop future leaders, and transfer knowledge, values, and governance capability from one generation to the next.

10. Conclusion

Enduring place-based rural governance in Aotearoa New Zealand is enabled by strong connections to place, enduring relationships, consistent leadership behaviours, intergenerational stewardship, adaptability, and a shared commitment to community wellbeing. While governance structures provide an important framework for decision-making, this research suggests that trust, belonging, stewardship, and the intentional transfer of governance capability across generations are the factors that enable governance to endure.

The historical and contemporary examples examined in this study demonstrate that enduring governance is rarely built through individual achievement alone. Rather, it emerges through the cumulative efforts of people working together over long periods of time, often across multiple generations, towards a shared purpose. The relationships, habits, values, and leadership practices developed along the way create the conditions through which governance becomes enduring.

The findings suggest that enduring governance is not simply about maintaining organisations or governance structures. Instead, it is about creating the conditions that allow people, communities, and organisations to grow stronger together over time. Strong governance builds trust, strengthens relationships, encourages participation, and provides continuity through periods of change and uncertainty. Equally important, it creates an environment where diverse perspectives can be expressed, respectfully challenged, and carefully considered without compromising relationships or organisational purpose. In this way, trust becomes an enabler of better governance rather than a substitute for robust decision-making. Enduring governance therefore depends not only on strong relationships, but also on a governance culture that values constructive challenge, thoughtful debate, and decisions made in the long-term interests of both organisations and the communities they serve.

A recurring theme throughout this research is the importance of leadership development and succession planning. Building governance capability requires a deliberate focus on identifying, supporting, and preparing future leaders while ensuring that knowledge, experience, values, relationships, and connection to place are effectively transferred across generations. The challenge for the future is not only to sustain existing governance capability, but also to create the time, space, support, and opportunities for emerging leaders to develop. By investing in future governors and creating clearer pathways from operational leadership into governance roles, rural communities can strengthen leadership continuity and build governance capability that endures.

As demonstrated by Whāngārā Farms, the endurance of the governance framework may prove more important than the longevity of the plan itself. Long-term aspirations can only be realised when governance capability, relationships, values, knowledge, and connection to place are successfully transferred across generations.

At its heart, enduring place-based rural governance is about more than decision-making. It is about stewardship, service, and the collective responsibility to leave communities, organisations, and landscapes stronger than they were found. Governance preserves organisational purpose, strengthens trusted relationships, reinforces connections to place, develops future leaders, and ensures that knowledge, values, and capability are carried forward from one generation to the next.

One of the most significant insights emerging from this research is that the mechanisms for building trust in rural governance appear to have changed remarkably little over almost 200 years, despite profound changes in governance structures, technology, and society. While governance systems continue to evolve, the human behaviours that sustain them—trust, mutual respect, shared purpose, service, and long-term commitment—remain fundamentally unchanged.

The research also suggests that enduring governance depends upon the ability to preserve relationships despite disagreement. In this respect, the quality of the relationship may be more important than agreement on any individual issue.

The true measure of enduring place-based rural governance is not how long individual leaders serve, but what endures because they served: stronger relationships, deeper connections to place, clearer organisational purpose, and governance capability that continues to strengthen communities across generations.

11. Recommendations

The findings of this research suggest that enduring place-based rural governance is not created through governance structures alone. Rather, it emerges through long-term investment in relationships, people, leadership capability, succession, and a shared commitment to place. Across both historical and contemporary examples, governance that endured was consistently underpinned by trusted relationships, strong community connections, consistent leadership behaviours, adaptability, and the deliberate development of future leaders.

Perhaps the most significant finding from this research is that relationships remain the foundation upon which enduring governance is built. Trust, credibility, and social connection take time to develop and frequently determine how effectively communities and organisations respond during periods of challenge, uncertainty, disagreement, and change. For this reason, the recommendations are intentionally presented in order of priority, beginning with relationships as the foundation upon which all other aspects of governance capability are built.

The following recommendations are proposed to strengthen governance capability within rural communities and organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Invest in Relationships Before They Are Needed

One of the strongest findings from this research was the importance of relationships. The enduring relationship between Richard Davis and Hōne Heke demonstrates that trust developed over many years can withstand periods of disagreement, uncertainty, and change. Similarly, contemporary examples highlighted the importance of trusted relationships in enabling collaboration, securing support, and sustaining collective action.

Relationships should not be viewed as a by-product of governance but as a core governance function. Trust, credibility, and social capital take time to develop and are often tested during periods of challenge. Leaders and governors should therefore invest deliberately in relationship building long before those relationships are required to navigate difficult decisions.

This could include:

- Investing time in relationship building across communities and sectors.
- Creating opportunities for regular engagement and collaboration.
- Encouraging respectful dialogue across differing perspectives.
- Building trust through consistent actions and long-term commitment.
- Recognising relationships as a strategic asset within governance systems.

Invest Earlier in People and Leadership Development

Just as rural communities invest heavily in land, livestock, infrastructure, and environmental stewardship, they must also invest deliberately in people. Enduring governance depends on a continuous pipeline of capable leaders who are prepared to contribute, learn, and eventually lead.

Leadership development should begin well before governance positions become available. Opportunities to participate in community initiatives, sporting organisations, environmental projects, and local leadership roles can provide valuable experience and help build governance capability over time. Developing leadership capability alone is insufficient if emerging leaders are unable to access meaningful governance opportunities. Investment in people must therefore be accompanied by clear pathways that allow leadership capability to be translated into governance experience and responsibility.

This could include:

- Identifying leadership potential at an early age.
- Expanding leadership development programmes.
- Encouraging participation in community and voluntary organisations.
- Supporting mentoring opportunities between experienced and emerging leaders.
- Investing in governance education and professional development.
- Encouraging the development of communication, relationship-building, reflection, and leadership habits from an early age.

Strengthen Governance Pathways

A recurring theme throughout this research was the importance of clear leadership pathways. The relationship between Sir James Carroll and Sir Āpirana Ngata demonstrated how governance capability can be intentionally developed through exposure, responsibility, mentoring, and practical experience. By contrast, many contemporary governance pathways remain informal, unclear, or difficult to access.

Strengthening governance pathways would improve succession, increase diversity of experience, and support the development of future governors.

Encourage Cross-Pollination of Governance Experience

Many of the leaders examined throughout this research gained experience across multiple organisations, sectors, and communities. Exposure to different governance environments broadens perspectives, improves decision-making capability, and encourages innovation.

Rural communities face increasingly complex challenges that often require collaboration across farming, environmental, commercial, community, and iwi sectors. Encouraging governors to operate across these environments can strengthen governance capability and improve collective outcomes.

Encourage Reflection and Long-Term Thinking

One of the more distinctive findings from this research was the role of consistent leadership behaviours and habits. Richard Davis demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to observation, reflection, learning, and record-keeping over many decades. These daily habits contributed to his understanding of people, place, and changing circumstances.

Governance capability is developed not only through action but also through reflection. Leaders require time and space to think strategically, learn from experience, and consider the long-term implications of decisions.

Prioritise Succession and Knowledge Transfer

The continuity of governance depends upon the successful transfer of knowledge, relationships, values, and experience between generations. Succession should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a single event.

The relationship between Sir James Carroll and Sir Āpirana Ngata demonstrated how leadership capability can be developed over time through mentoring, experience, and increasing responsibility. Similar approaches are needed within contemporary governance organisations to ensure future leaders are prepared to step forward when required.

Collectively, these recommendations recognise that enduring place-based rural governance is built over time. While governance structures and processes remain important, **people, relationships, leadership capability, and a long-term commitment to place are the foundations that enable governance to endure across generations.**

12. Limitations

Literature Limitations

There is a relatively small body of literature specifically addressing enduring place-based rural governance in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consequently, this research draws upon related fields including rural leadership, community development, environmental governance, Māori development, organisational governance, and rural resilience. While these fields provide valuable insights, they do not always examine enduring governance directly.

Secondary Source Limitations

This research relied primarily on secondary sources, including historical records, biographies, strategic plans, governance resources, Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme reports, and published literature. No formal interviews or surveys were undertaken. While this approach enabled the examination of historical and contemporary examples across different contexts, it limited the opportunity to compare the findings with the experiences and perspectives of current governance practitioners.

Historical Record Limitations

The historical case studies rely on surviving records and published accounts, which may not fully represent all perspectives, particularly those of Māori communities. Historical sources may also overlook the everyday experiences and contributions of individuals whose perspectives were not formally documented. As with any historical analysis, the findings are constrained by the availability and interpretation of surviving evidence.

Leadership and Governance Limitations

Several of the historical examples examined pre-date contemporary governance structures and therefore reflect leadership, stewardship, influence, and relationship-building rather than formal governance roles as they are understood today. This distinction is important because the study explores how enduring leadership contributes to enduring place-based rural governance. The examples were included because they provide valuable insights into the relationships, behaviours, stewardship, and leadership practices that underpin governance over time. Throughout this report, leadership and governance are therefore treated as closely related and, at times, overlapping concepts.

Generalisability

Given the qualitative design and the relatively small number of case studies, the findings are not intended to be statistically representative of all rural communities, organisations, or governance settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. Rather, they identify recurring themes and characteristics that may inform future governance practice and provide a foundation for further research.

Case Study Selection

The case studies were intentionally selected because they demonstrated enduring leadership, enduring relationships, intergenerational stewardship, and strong connections to place. As a result, the research focuses primarily on examples that have endured over time. Alternative case studies, including examples of unsuccessful or short-lived governance arrangements, may have highlighted different themes or produced different conclusions. The findings should therefore be interpreted as an exploration of characteristics associated with enduring place-based rural governance rather than evidence of direct causation.

Researcher Positionality and Potential Bias

This research was undertaken from the perspective of a rural practitioner actively involved in environmental restoration, community engagement, and governance-related activities. The author's personal and family connections to rural New Zealand influenced both the selection of the research topic and some of the case studies examined, including Reverend Richard Davis, who is a direct ancestor of the author. The author is also General Manager of Project Parore, one of the contemporary case studies discussed within this report.

These connections provided valuable contextual understanding of rural communities, leadership, governance, and place. However, they also created the potential for researcher bias in the selection, interpretation, and emphasis of themes.

To minimise this risk, findings were interpreted alongside published literature, historical records, strategic documents, governance resources, and multiple case studies from different historical periods and organisational contexts. Conclusions were drawn from themes that emerged consistently across these sources rather than from any individual case study. The inclusion of historical, contemporary, Māori, environmental, community, and organisational examples was intended to provide a broader perspective and reduce reliance on any single viewpoint.

The intention of this research is not to present a definitive model of enduring place-based rural governance. Rather, it seeks to identify lessons from the past, insights from the present, and opportunities for the future that may assist rural communities, organisations, and leaders seeking to strengthen governance capability and support governance that endures across generations.

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