



KELLOGG
RURAL LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMME



The Craft of Setting the Table Well

Progressing catchment group aspirations through effective governance.

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Di Roadley

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2 Executive Summary

The craft of a well set table is what enables Catchment Groups to turn aspiration into action. Effective governance provides the clarity, capability, and trust needed for communities to see real, on the ground outcomes. Naturally outcomes vary widely across Catchment Groups, as each community responds to its own set of needs, challenges, and long-term aspirations. When the governance table is well set; with purpose, structure, and skilled governors; decisions align with community aspirations and progress towards outcomes becomes visible and sustained. This is the essence of future-fit rural governance: a system where the craft of governing well produces outcomes that matter to the people and places it serves.

However, In recent times cracks are starting to show, as the governance environment facing rural Catchment Groups has shifted dramatically in responsibility and complexity. These groups that operate on goodwill and volunteer energy now find themselves responsible for significant public and private investment, along with the expectations that come with managing those funds wisely. Many are employing staff, overseeing contractors, and delivering government contracts that carry strict conditions and professional accountability. The demands of financial management have grown, as have the legal, health and safety, data stewardship, and reporting obligations that accompany modern environmental work. What was once a relatively informal community role has evolved into a complex governance responsibility that requires a higher level of skill, confidence, and oversight than ever before.

Despite this rising complexity, many Catchment Groups are attempting to meet these expectations without the structures and frameworks that should underpin the governance table. In the absence of these scaffolds, the table becomes unstable. Expectations lose their clarity, decision making begins to drift, and the burden of responsibility settles on a small number of increasingly exhausted volunteers. Governance shifts from being intentional to being improvised, and the result is effort that scatters rather than accumulates. Processes become inconsistent, time is spent on work that does not lead to meaningful outcomes, and the sense of progress towards the desired purpose begins to erode. At the same time, financial pressure grows, funding becomes harder to secure, and environmental challenges continue to intensify. Communities start to disengage, some resist the investment required for change, and trust in leadership becomes fragile. Over reliance on a few individuals deepens the strain. A governance table without structure simply cannot carry the weight of the work, particularly now that the work has become heavier, more complex, and more professionally demanding.

As these pressures increase, another risk is becoming more visible: representation drift. When governance roles expand, decision making can begin to move away from the grassroots members it serves. The lived realities, local stories, and day to day pressures of the community can become less visible to those at the table. When this happens, the mandate that gives governance its legitimacy starts to weaken. Trust becomes harder to maintain, and the sense of shared purpose that once anchored the group can begin to fray. This report recognises this as a critical vulnerability, but also shows how it can be countered by strengthening local voice, embedding community anchored processes, and ensuring that governance remains grounded in the realities of the people who give it purpose.

This research shows that the path forward is clear. Rural communities need a strong and adaptable governance framework that provides the scaffolds, guardrails, and shared operating discipline required for action oriented governance. When the table is well built, with solid legs, clear settings, and a purpose anchored pathway, governors can focus on governing. They can maintain oversight of complex programmes, manage risk, uphold accountability, and ensure that community aspirations are translated into real, measurable outcomes.

A strong framework must be paired with the capability of the people sitting at the table. The framework provides the structure, but governors provide the judgement, relationships, and behaviours that bring it to life. Without clarity of role, shared expectations, and a consistent operating rhythm, even skilled governors struggle to be effective. When these elements are in place, governors can contribute confidently, distribute workload fairly, and uphold the standards of behaviour and accountability that communities expect. In this way, the framework becomes both the foundation and the enabler. It steadies the table so governors can perform well, and it supports the system so long term purpose can be achieved.

This research draws on interviews with governors, insights from catchment members, and relevant literature and uses case studies to highlight examples. Across all lenses, the same conclusion emerges: regardless of size, structure, or distance from the ground, the same foundations of good governance consistently apply. These findings directly inform the recommendations that follow, translating insight into practical actions for strengthening governance and long term sustainability.

Together, these recommendations form a blueprint for a governance table capable of carrying the weight of rural ambition and nourishing the communities it serves.

2.1 Summary of Recommendations

Foundations of a Framework-Led System

Strengthening Catchment Groups requires coordinated action across national support, governance practice, membership behaviour, and government funding.

A strong national framework provides the bones; governors shape it; members activate it; government enables it.

1. Catchment Communities Aotearoa (CCA): Provide the National Framework

- Provide the operating framework that all groups can tailor to their local purpose.
- Deliver governance training and resources through structured programmes, templates, and expert facilitation.
- Support sustainable resourcing with open-access tools and tiered support.
- Develop leadership pathways including mentoring and succession planning.
- Strengthen knowledge sharing through research, case studies, and best-practice tools.

2. Catchment Group Governors: Tailor and Apply the Framework

- Use and adapt CCA templates to reflect local aspirations and purpose.
- Establish clear purpose and direction that guides long-term strategy.
- Resource core operational capability (administration, coordination, communications).
- Invest in governance capability through training, mentoring, and succession planning.
- Set and uphold clear expectations for roles, responsibilities, and accountability.

3. Catchment Group Members and Farmers: Activate the Framework

- Share responsibility for strong governance through active, accountable participation.
- Engage consistently with communication, responsiveness, and solution-focused behaviour.
- Strengthen representation in policy engagement and leadership pipelines.
- Support and encourage emerging leaders.

4. New Zealand Government: Provide Long-Term, Equitable Funding

- Fund long-term horizons with adequate, multi-year investment into Catchment Groups.
- Directly resource CCA adequately to deliver national governance support.
- Design reporting frameworks that drive outcomes without draining volunteer capacity.

When these recommendations are embedded, they provide a clear pathway for Catchment Groups to strengthen their governance, build capability, and create enduring programmes that deliver long-term, positive outcomes for their communities.

With a well-built governance table and a shared commitment to purpose, capability, and collective responsibility, Catchment Groups can move beyond survival mode. They can become confident, future-fit community institutions capable of delivering the environmental, social, and cultural outcomes that matter most to the places they call home. Strong governance is an ecosystem, not a seat; reinforced or weakened by the behaviours of all who participate in it.

3 Acknowledgements

Being able to make space to read widely and think deeply about this topic has been a gift. Thank you to Beef + Lamb New Zealand, Guardians of the Ruakituri and Hawke's Bay Regional Council for your financial and sounding-board support.

Conducting the interviews has been a real privilege, I am very grateful to the governors who shared with such openness in these interviews and for generously giving their time to provide insights and sharing experiences that have shaped these findings, I am humbled by the commitment these people give to their work and their dedication to not only self-development but that of those around them and the industry as a whole. To those who participated in the survey and picked up the phone to my many questions and ponderings; thank you! It was deeply important to me that this body of work reflected the realities of rural people; the unique stresses and incredible commitment to continuous learning and striving for great outcomes for the land and communities. I salute you and am proud to be considered a rural community member.

To the Rural Leaders team, thank you for designing and facilitating such a meaningful opportunity. The learning has far exceeded my expectations and stretched my thinking in ways I couldn't have anticipated. Renee thanks for the challenge and genuine care you have supported us with, I shall be forever keeping watchful for those tutu's at rural events!

To my fellow Kellogg 55'ers, thank you. What a ride it's been! I've learned a great deal from you, but it's your compassion, your humour, and your authenticity that has stayed with me the most. Your generosity of spirit has enabled me to make sense of the content and the world around it. Your passion for our industry fills me with confidence that Aotearoa's heartland is not just in good hands, it's a great tribe to be part of.

4 Introduction

Preface

A well-set table doesn't need to explain itself; its quiet order speaks of care. The polished surfaces, the thoughtful placement, the sense of readiness all hint at a community that values how it gathers. A culture where people show respect through preparation, where gratitude is embedded in the way the space is held. There is a hum of anticipation, the feeling that something meaningful is about to unfold, that those who arrive will be nourished not just by what is served but by the intention behind it.

Laughter in the carpark signals the guests arrival, the table becomes lively, still purposeful, still rooted in care, but humming with a kind of beautiful, unruly energy. Guests lean in, talking over one another with warmth rather than malice, their banter rising and falling like a chorus. Long-held traditions sit comfortably beside bursts of innovation; one person brings the old stories, another brings fresh ideas, and together they create a rhythm that is messy but alive. Values are shared, even if the approaches are wildly different, and that diversity enriches the conversation.

But the scene grows slightly chaotic over time: someone veers off into a side story, another dives into a pet project that has little to do with the purpose of the gathering, and soon the table is juggling three conversations at once. They are working hard, harder than they need to because their enthusiasm spills in every direction. The intention is good, the commitment is real, but the path to the outcome is anything but straight.

Someone arrives unprepared, and the whole gathering must pause to catch them up. The momentum drains. The once-warm chaos now feels disjointed, the conversation splintering into fragments that pull the table further from its shared purpose. Cracks begin to show: side discussions bloom into distractions, pet projects derail the agenda, and the energy that once felt vibrant now feels scattered and strained.

Over time and with increasing pressure, that same table, once lively now tilts toward something more brittle. The banter sharpens, a joke lands wrong, and suddenly an argument flares across the plates. Voices rise, chairs scrape back. A couple of guests, too weary to keep circling the same tensions, quietly leave the table; their absence hangs in the air like a draft. Others stay but fold their arms, disgruntled that their needs aren't being met, their ideas unheard, their patience worn thin...

Context of the Research

Farming in Aotearoa New Zealand is structurally fragmented: individual businesses operate in competitive markets while also seeking ways to collaborate to improve practice and provide mutual support. For decades this collaboration has taken the form of Farm Discussion Groups, which since the early 1950s have enabled farmers to benchmark physical and financial performance, test practical solutions, and share tacit knowledge.

In recent years a new wave of farmer-led groups has emerged and expanded rapidly, outpacing traditional discussion groups in number and geographic coverage. Unlike single-farm discussion groups, these Catchment Groups are place-based and community-wide, often spanning watersheds and social boundaries to invite broad local participation. Their focus is action-oriented

and diverse; farming capability, environmental monitoring and outcomes, biosecurity, community wellbeing, social cohesion, and emergency preparedness. Because each group responds to unique local priorities, those outside the immediate community can struggle to grasp the variety of aims and activities they pursue.

These Catchment Groups are fundamentally grassroots and ground-up: landowners have granular input into scope and direction, which both enables change and attracts participation. That local agency has been publicly recognised by government, with ministers noting that Catchment Groups “empower farmers to collaborate, innovate, and share knowledge; farmers know their land best.”

Catchment Group Rise

Catchment Groups, though largely voluntary, have rapidly taken on ambitious, practical work across rural communities, and over the past five years funding has followed to support that momentum. Government agencies, industry bodies and local councils have struggled to keep pace with the speed and complexity of new group formation, meaning support systems and resourcing have often been ad hoc and unequitable. Many groups begin with simple governance; community-minded people giving time and expertise to formalise the group so it can apply for funding from ministries, councils and philanthropic trusts. That funding has enabled groups to set their own pace, deliver practical programmes, and pivot quickly when new information or disasters, such as extreme weather events, demand it.

Maturing into Collectives

As Catchment Groups scale up, a practical logic has pushed neighbours to pool resources and coordinate across boundaries, which in turn has given rise to Catchment Collectives. These landowner-led structures support multiple groups, manage shared projects and funding, and deliver economies of scale. These collectives help bridge the tension between hands-on, place-based project delivery and the growing governance demands of financial management, compliance and reporting that can pull people away from the kaupapa that initially drew them in.

Historically the Ministry for Primary Industries funded individual groups, but the sheer proliferation has proved unworkable. The Crown has signalled a clear shift toward collective, regional funding, reduced overall quantum, and an expectation that groups move toward self-sustainable funding. That policy change has accelerated cross-district collaboration and is reshaping how support and investment are organised, so practical delivery, local trust and governance must be carefully balanced if Catchment Groups are to remain effective and viable.

Shifting Rural Governance

For many local people, governance is not a skillset they arrive at the table with; it is something they learn on the job, often by feel, and often under pressure. The commitment required from a small number of dedicated individuals is significant. Without an agreed set of principles to guide practice, Catchment Groups and Collectives risk relying too heavily on goodwill rather than building the foundations of an enduring organisation.

Over time, the expectations placed on these groups have expanded far beyond what volunteer governance was ever anticipated to carry. What began as community coordination has grown into a role that must navigate; responsibility creep across environmental outcomes, climate change responses, community wellbeing, disaster recovery, and the ongoing work of engaging with Crown agencies, iwi, landowners, and regional partners. The scale of funding has increased, as have the reporting, compliance, and accountability requirements that accompany it. With this growth comes heightened professional and personal risk for governors, who are now expected to exercise judgement across financial oversight, legal obligations, health and safety, data stewardship, and the delivery of complex programmes.

Contextually, the issues facing Catchment Groups are wide-ranging, but the core problem is clear: the level of responsibility and complexity has grown enormously, while the support structures required to enable good governance have not kept pace.

In this environment, even the most committed governors can struggle to keep their eyes on both the individual moving parts and the sum of those parts that ultimately determines whether community aspirations are achieved.

An action-oriented governance approach can only succeed when it is anchored in a strong framework. With the right framework in place, groups can set the table with the components they need, maintain oversight of the whole system, and ensure governors are nourished and supported in ways that allow them to create real value for their communities.

5 Aim

Due to the rapid pace of establishment across Catchments Groups and Collectives, they pose a unique opportunity to intentionally craft governance structures in real-time. This paper seeks to provide recommendations that will enable rural governors to deliver great outcomes for their communities for generations to come.

It is important to this work that the recommendations are robust, practical and achievable, drawing on the lived experience of people actively developing or scaling rural representation, alongside academic research and proven models. The aim is to equip emerging and established groups with the tools and knowledge they need to build functional governance, and crucially retains the mandate of the landowners the leaders seek to represent and serve.

It assumes a reciprocal relationship between grassroots members and governors, recognising that each contributes critically to successful outcomes, and that such reciprocity must be active, intentionally developed, and embedded in practice. The study seeks to identify tangible, recommendable actions and importantly specify who should develop and practise them.

5.1 Out of Scope

This project focuses on governance and collective structures rather than the particular outcomes or community initiatives groups pursue.

Developing shared values is acknowledged as step one of governance; the foundation of why people are coming to the table, the value they see and the willingness to join together for shared kai however examining this critical aspect is beyond the limited scope and timeframe of this Kellogg study.

6 Literature Review

Background

New Zealand's agricultural sector spans much of Aotearoa and remains a cornerstone of the national economy. The December 2025 SOPI report forecasts food and fibre exports reaching \$60.4 billion, reaffirming the sector's central role in the country's export profile. This economic significance is echoed in the KPMG (2025) Agribusiness Agenda, which highlights the sector's contribution to national resilience and the increasing expectations placed on farmers to demonstrate environmental stewardship. In response, the government has invested in Catchment Groups as a mechanism to support environmental outcomes, strengthen rural communities, and underpin export productivity and resilience (McClay & Hoggard, 2025).

Farmers and landowners have mobilised into Catchment Groups at a scale unprecedented in history. This mobilisation reflects the pressures and opportunities facing modern farming businesses: participation in global export markets increasingly requires evidence of environmental performance, while rural communities are disproportionately affected by climate-driven weather events. As these groups have grown, their governance responsibilities have expanded significantly. Many have formed organically, and early signs of structural strain are now emerging: several groups are losing momentum and engagement, while others are showing symptoms of volunteer fatigue such as struggling to retain or attract leaders into their governance structure; posing direct risks to achieving the outcomes expected by members, regulators, and markets.

This review of research provides insight into the structures and practices that could help build durable scaffolds for Catchment Groups that are capable of delivering on the aspirations of members and the expectations of the wider system. The review has deliberately sought New Zealand rural studies and academic works that appear to translate into the rural governance landscape.

Building Trust

"We know that trust is a must, if we are to solve the challenges we are facing as a collective"

(World Economic Forum, 2021).

Collaborative Governance

The erosion of trust identified by the World Economic Forum (2021) pervades all levels of leadership. As the old saying goes, 'trust is hard won and easily lost', a sentiment that aligns closely with contemporary research on institutional confidence. In Aotearoa New Zealand, it manifests within rural governance systems where success depends on relationships among communities, farmers and landowners, scientists, iwi Māori, Mana Whenua, funders, and government agencies.

In contrast to formal board structures where members are selected and employed on merit to fill specific roles, rural Leadership groups tend to form organically out of a shared need, which is more

akin to a collaboration of leaders or a 'coalition of the willing'. Kareska (2025) notes that such arrangements often generate increased member commitment because farmers can clearly see how their contributions shape outcomes.

Trust among participants is crucial for building shared goals and mutual understanding within collaborative governance systems, as emphasised by Osei (2024), drawing on the work of Emerson and Nabatchi (2015). Those groups that can foster trust both within their membership and with wider stakeholder groups, such as government agencies, are most likely to receive funding, which in turn grows trust by providing deliverables. Parker et al. (2008) describe trust as "one of the most important assets that a governing institution can possess".

Pathways to Build Trust

A reciprocal, at least two party relationship is focused on. The trusted and the trustor, the relationship only survives where those who are bestowed with trust behave in certain trustworthy ways, and those who are the trustees need to have confidence and belief that those they give their trust to will continue to behave in their best interests and are capable of doing what they say they will and therefore remain accountable.

Trust has been shown to be a key element of social licence to operate (SLO) (Thomson & Boutilier, 2011). The concept of Social License is widely used across media and is an informal notion that potentially identifies what new groups are seeking to achieve; it encompasses both legitimacy and mandate. Researchers at NZ Landcare Trust advise that Relationships and trust are central to SLO, trust cannot be demanded and that Communities grant SLO. (Stronge, Kannemeyer, and Edwards (n.d.)) In the Partnering for Change Project, farmers were connected with urban businesses creating opportunities for deeper and authentic understanding to develop. Results from the pilot showed positive change in SLO due to developing relationships and trust being established, (Scarlati 2023).

The trust–social licence framework used here Figure 1. is adapted from Boutilier and Thomson's (2011) model of social licence to operate, which links communication, cultural values, and engagement to trust and community acceptance it highlights how trust is the filter for groups to achieve the desired SLO and is powered by behaving in trustworthy ways through actions, including communication, values, and partnership.



Figure 1: Shows the framing of the priority position that trust holds in the concept of social license to operate, and the factors that contribute to trust, as described in the literature. (Boutilier & Thomson, 2011)

As humans, we inherently know that Trust is cemented in social relationships, founded on ways people experience their relationships with each other and the institutions or organisations they interact with. Trust is the glue that holds society together and facilitates cooperation, social cohesion, and functional relationships both with individual and institutional relationships (Schilke, Reimann, & Cook, 2021; Bachmann, 1998).

Beyond the scholars, what is less understood by community leaders is the potential to actively establish and build trust within an entity, such as a Governance group. There is the ability to actively grow trust in the entity, by the behaviours and mana of the people who are within it.

Intentional Relationships

Intentional Relationships can fast-track the building of trust by sharing or endowing trust and mana from an individual onto the entity they are within. The critical importance of individual trust is discussed by Edwards et al. (2019) whose results reaffirmed Lacey et al. (2018) that even with changing information sources, individual and institutional trust are built through engagement and relationships involving face-to-face contact.

The Trust Flows Project (Duckworth et al., 2024) explores this concept further, noting that trust is a reciprocal flow between parties and describing it as a '*mode of dynamic, relational and interactive social capital exchanged via social relationships and environments*'. If this is the case, and trust is understood as a reciprocal interaction, then, as Stephenson (2004) pointed out, "*reciprocity is key to the power of networks*" (p. 40). It follows that, assuming the environment allows a good relationship to build, trust could reasonably be expected to follow.

However, trusted relationships aren't something you cross your fingers for; it's something you build deliberately through the way you show up, speak plainly, listen well, and follow through. Research by Hart (2026) supports these findings, purporting that the quality of relationships improves when

leaders participate in deliberate meaningful relationship building, which they term 'coaching conversations'.

Furthermore, Covey argues that trust grows from deliberate, observable behaviours, things like transparency, keeping commitments, and demonstrating respect, which leaders can choose to do and repeat over time (Covey, 2006). This aligns closely with Ostrom's work on collective action, which shows that groups are more successful when leaders model reciprocity, communicate openly, and create predictable, reliable patterns of interaction that others can anchor to (Ostrom, 1990).

For Catchment Groups, this means leaders can actively shape the trust landscape by taking a relationship systems view: recognising that every conversation, farm-gate chat, meeting, and decision feeds into a wider network of the relationship trust-bank. When leaders consistently act with clarity, respect, and reliability in their personal interactions, those behaviours ripple outward, strengthening organisational reputation and culture while creating the conditions where trust becomes self-reinforcing across the whole catchment community.

Accountability

The literature supports accountability as a key driver of trust, and it is the accountability of governors that binds this ecosystem together. Leaders answer to members, whose trust authorises them, to partners who collaborate, and to funders and policy systems that enable the work. Cornwall (2008) and OECD (2024) emphasise transparency as the currency of accountability.

For Governors, accountability and trust are mutually reinforcing; accountability proves trustworthiness, and trust sustains the willingness to be accountable, while the opposite could also be so. The Trust Flows Project (2023) demonstrates that disclosed decision pathways build credibility faster than outcomes alone. Where decisions are perceived as having a hidden agenda or not doing what they say they will, trust can quickly be eroded.

To achieve this transparent accountability, a set of professional standards, such as clear governance manuals, open financial reporting, regular evaluation, and converting intent into action is required. Clarity and agreement on this shared way of working could provide the blueprint we are seeking to enable trust and social license to operate.

Representation Drift

Grassroots initiatives often strengthen through professionalisation or are professionalised through necessity as they interact with funders and broader support agencies; this process can result in a lack of authenticity in decision-making during the process. Michels (1911) coined this the 'iron law of oligarchy', growth brings structure; structure brings distance. Farmer-led Catchment Groups face similar risks. Cornwall (2008) calls this "professionalised participation," where enthusiasm is replaced by administration.

The NZ Landcare Trust (2023) urges groups to retain relational transparency, while Scarlatti (2025) confirmed that a ground-up approach works when relationships are genuine, and the right people are in the right roles. Similarly, Waikato Regional Council (2023) observed that local

autonomy, when supported by clear facilitation and equitable funding, sustains commitment far longer than compliance mechanisms.

For catchment leaders, this balance between empowerment and coordination is the craft of collaboration and having the right structures in place as guardrails. Overly centralised decision-making disempowers contributors, while under-structured networks drift into inconsistency. Kay (2025) echoes these lessons, arguing that [collaboration flourishes at the intersection of trust and structure](#).

The Importance of Deliberate Design and Role Clarity

Research by Bryson et al. (2015) emphasizes that collaborators must gain significant benefits unattainable alone and should adopt a deliberate design approach; planning processes, structures, and intentions with clear outcomes in mind. The design thinking model is relevant to current catchment group collaborations.

If we accept that participation must deliver reciprocal value, it is interesting that there is real tension between the different groups within a hierarchy, having opposing needs to be met. Those at ground level often focus on tangible outcomes; they are project-focused, while those at the governance level may have their focus on connecting with funding providers, meeting the expectations of different legal obligations, and bringing the diverse ideas together in a cohesive way to chart a course via the strategic plan towards achieving the agreed purpose.

The willingness of each party to have empathy for the constraints each operates within can potentially be achieved through open and honest conversations, providing clarity in advance and a determination to actively understand and seek a positive outcome. Edwards et al. (2009) identified information transparency as both an incentive and a trust-building mechanism. Both Landcare Trust (2023) and Scarlatti (2025) support this, framing communication and coordination roles as investments, not overheads, highlighting the importance of active relationship management as potentially a paid role, shaped by those who are skilful, connected, resourceful and trusted by the community.

Design Thinking as a Framework for Adaptive Collaboration

The opportunity to design collaborative structures is unfolding within Catchment Groups. Leadership and power dynamic considerations are crucial; including farmers in plan design can build trust. Keith Yamashita's design thinking model supports balancing power by intentionally 'holding the pen', ensuring those affected have influence over decisions.

Design thinking offers structured empathy: an iterative method for linking innovation with participation. Brown, (2008) notes the importance of a structured sequence, which mirrors the adaptive cycles already visible in effective collaborations as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Structured sequence of adaptive cycles for effective Collaborations- Brown (2008).

Applied to catchment management, it invites diverse perspectives early, rescales issues to manageable prototypes, and builds confidence through trial. Brown (2018) and the OECD (2024) each confirm that iterative co-creation strengthens trust because it decentralises innovation and power. Scarlatti (2023) describes Waip2k Catchment group Evaluation in similar terms, encouraging starting small and progressing to larger visionary projects with continual reflection before broader implementation. Planning design that intentionally includes an opportunity for experts and experience to shape the plan.

Mentoring and Social Learning as the Engine of Change

Social learning, the 'collective assimilation of knowledge through dialogue', is the lifeblood of adaptive governance (Keen et al., 2005; Reed et al., 2010). In the Catchment Group context, it happens informally, 'over the fence', and formally, through facilitated field days or monitoring groups. The important and powerful learning that happens as farmers and growers work together towards solutions to their big problems is a key strategy of most Catchment Groups. Most good facilitators will know that while they can present an idea to the group, the real magic occurs when there is active participation with the group, through shared examples and solution opportunities with stories arising from experience.

Baumgart-Getz et al. (2012) and Prokopy et al. (2008) confirmed peer exchange as the linchpin of behavioural change. While The Trust Flows Project (2023) extends this, describing how open feedback between action and evidence forms relational capital, sustaining momentum. Taking this a step further are those who lead by example and extend this into governance.

Across rural communities, there is a noticeable gap where mentoring is limited. Strong, well-established mentoring exists in practical domains such as discussion groups, dog training, and fencing. However, when it comes to guidance in governance, far fewer people feel confident enough to share their knowledge. The difference between this happening randomly or organically is the deliberate creation of the structures that provide the opportunity for peer learning to drive impact and change.

We see an effective example at the Rangitikei River Catchment Collective, where blending iwi, landowners, and scientists illustrates this principle in practice. Its co-governance model prioritises joint monitoring and transparent reporting, transforming technical data into collective learning and legitimacy.

If the role of Governance is critical for modern catchment leaders, social learning is no longer peripheral education; it is the governance process itself.

Balancing Power and Expertise through Co-Design

One key concept in the literature is that trust thrives where power is shared and roles are clear. This idea is supported by Ran and Qi (2018), who discuss how power sharing promotes fairness and collaborative identity, which in turn builds organisational trust. Similarly, leadership studies highlight that trust flourishes in environments and teams where roles are transparent and power is distributed (Rothhouse, 2020; Aypay, 2023). As Kay (2025) notes, 'clarity of purpose and clarity of roles are twin guards against friction'. This principle underpins the potential design of durable catchment governance frameworks.

Currently, across our rural landscapes, governors have the ability to Co-Design systems where grassroots insight and expert knowledge intersect meaningfully. The Landcare Trust (2023) describes this as 'structured inclusion', embedding lived experience and technical expertise as co-equals in planning. This approach gives catchment groups a practical framework to strengthen their social licence to operate, build trust and transparency, and show that their work genuinely reflects what the community values. When people with lived experience are recognised for the knowledge they bring, and their perspectives are combined with expert input, confidence in the process and its outcomes naturally grows.

In Figure 3, the first two icons prioritise relationships and share power, they highlight how this work should begin: by treating relationships as the work itself, not as an add-on. The other two build capability and use participatory means, show how collaboration can be put into practice. (Stronge, Kannemeyer, & Edwards, n.d.)

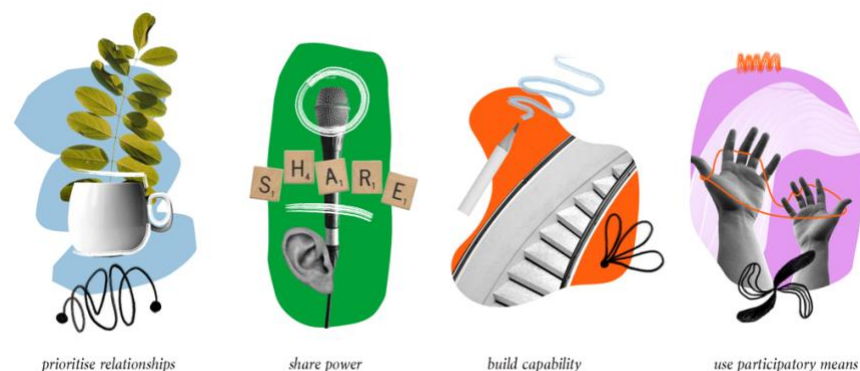


Figure 3. Shows the Co-Design key components as developed by Beyond Stick Notes. Doing Co-design for real: mindsets, methods and movements. McKercher, K.A. (2020).

Formalising the Rules: The “Prenup” Principle

Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) describe early rule-setting as a 'Prenup' that protects goodwill. For Catchment Groups, this means agreeing and documenting how decisions are made, how data is shared, and how conflicts are resolved. One prominent collective in Hawke's Bay developed its way of working and utilised the Co-Chair structure, with shared responsibilities across mana whenua and local farmers. The process of establishing this necessitated robust and clear discussions around roles and responsibilities.

The Trust Flows Project (2023) and OECD (2024) confirm that procedural fairness directly enhances trust perceptions. Importantly, Sinner et al. (2023) recommend periodic review to ensure evolving representation and expectations remain aligned. If the preup has milestones with timeframes, planned check-in and feedback opportunities with structures for this to be embedded, then a group can continue to focus on their day-to-day mahi, while confidence and trust grow around the governance.

The Importance of a Strong Team for Results

Given the critical link between the governance group and achieving the desired outcomes, benefits could be assumed when the governance group aspires to act as a high-performing team. The Rocket Model, developed by Dr Curphy and Hogan (2012) provides the potential structure to achieve results (Figure 4). The Rocket Model describes a direct pathway for teams to deliberately build towards results by moving through seven phases, which, combined with Sinner's (2023) reminders to check in to stay aligned, could provide a useful roadmap for Catchment group governors to work towards.

Curphy and Hogan's Rocket Model further reinforces the idea that high-performing teams rely on clear expectations, aligned roles, and reliable follow-through, all of which are grounded in trust-building behaviours (Curphy & Hogan, 2012, p. 14). For Catchment Groups, these insights point to a practical systems approach: leaders can actively shape the trust environment by showing up consistently in their personal relationships.

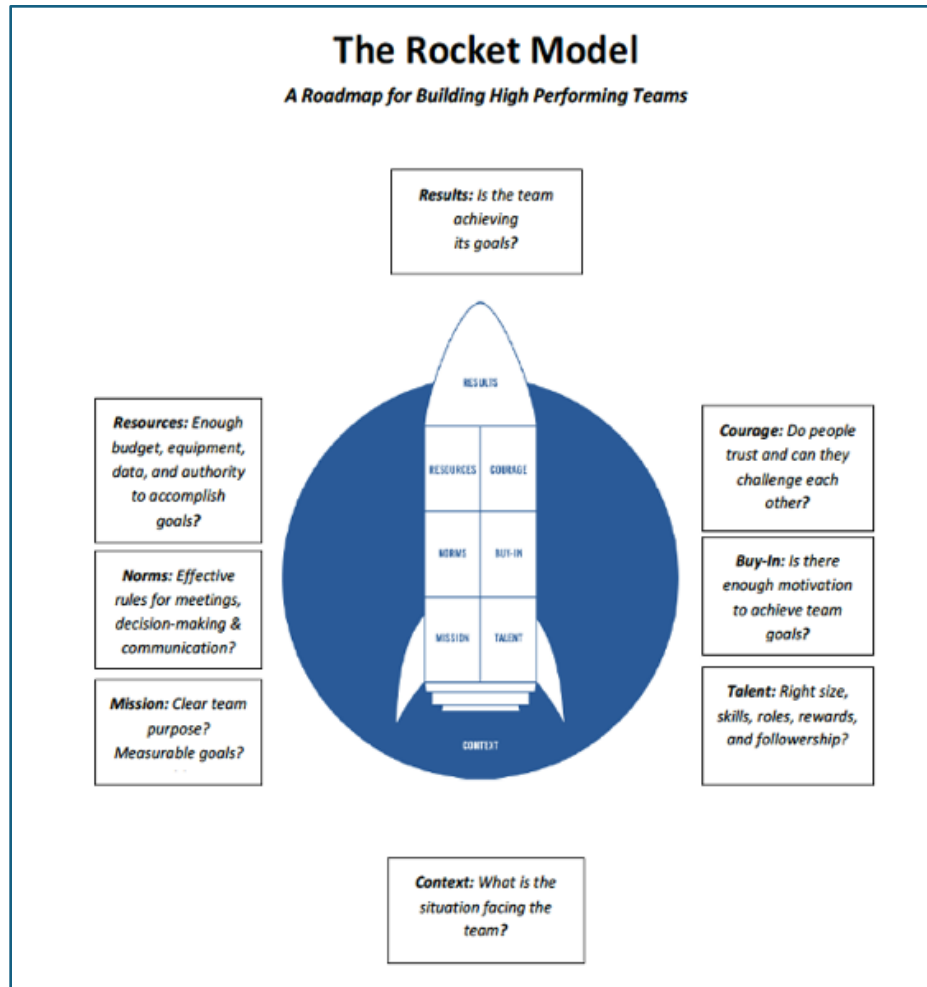


Figure 3: The Rocket model as framed by Curphy & Hogan (2012), describing the phases to flow through in order to build a high-performing team that is focused on achieving results.

The thinking is extended through the Rocket Model, emphasising that high-performing teams are built by deliberately selecting the right mix of people, including those who bring independence, challenge assumptions, and contribute specialist expertise; they note that teams can ‘buy the expertise they need’ by drawing on advisors, consultants, or co-opted members to strengthen decision-making and avoid siloed thinking (Curphy & Hogan, 2012, p. 27). For Catchment Groups, these insights point to a practical systems approach: leaders can actively shape the trust environment by showing up consistently in their personal relationships and by ensuring the right capability and independence are present around the table.

Utilising the Rocket model, Catchment governance could progress confidently towards desired goals in a structured and intentional way, and when developed by members and shaped by the inclusion of experience and expert advice, the results achieved should well align with those original ambitions and provide the desired transparency and accountability to maintain trust with all stakeholders.

Insights from Literature

Across the literature review, trust emerges as renewable infrastructure linking people, accountability and providing mandate. Multiple papers highlight that where trust is strong, power is shared, knowledge co-created, and intent transparent, organisations adapt faster and maintain legitimacy longer. Trust is a tangible currency developed interpersonally and shared with institutions through the behaviours of those within them; it can be deliberately built but conversely eroded by behaviours that do not meet members' expectations.

A solid theme running through the literature is that effective collaboration thrives where there is deliberate planning and structures in place, including taking time to clarify what all parties need and want from the collaboration and importantly laying these as the foundation for working together.

For New Zealand's catchment leaders, the implications are clear. Intentionally build collaborative structures that combine deliberate human relationships with professional rigor; trust, once designed into governance, becomes both compass and currency, the defining measure of Catchment Collectives.

7 Methodology

This project adopts a quadrangular methodological approach, drawing on four complementary sources of insight to build robust and recommendable actions (Figure 5).

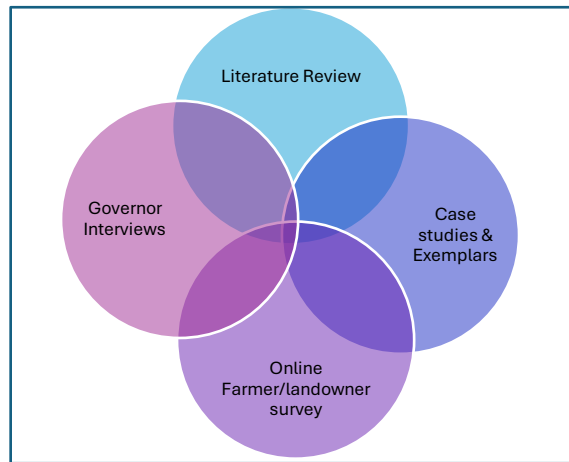


Figure 4: Shows the quadrangle approach, illustrating the comparative focus between the literature review, and information gathered from the survey and governors interviews, with a critical analysis of the common crossover sections supported by useful insights exemplified through case studies and exemplars.

A broad online survey was used to capture the expectations and opinions of a cross-section of farmers and rural community members. These responses were then compared with seven extended semi-structured interviews with rural governors, providing a deeper view of governance practice, identity, and lived experience. The findings from these two empirical components were analysed alongside a wide body of literature from the New Zealand agricultural sector and international research on collaboration, leadership, and governance. Finally, a small number of targeted case studies were incorporated to ground-truth emerging insights, test underlying premises, and illustrate how theory plays out in real rural contexts. Together, these four strands form a coherent and rigorous foundation for the recommendations that follow.

Literature Review

A rapid literature review was conducted to examine academic research and international models that highlight effective hierarchical relationships, particularly focused on group or team dynamics, and the drivers of trust to enhance effective collaboration. This review was enriched by the deliberate inclusion of rural-specific examples from Aotearoa New Zealand. There are many widely recognised models and drivers that form effective teams, these were examined for relevance and application to the specific parameters of this study in the rural context. Drivers were also sought that could be transferable within the catchment group and collective context. The review was shaped to better understand the drivers of effective rural governance, and to identify what commonalities could be identified and utilised, to inform best practice.

Key aspects to understand were:

- The mechanics of building and retaining trust,
- The complexities of retaining social licence and ground-up mandate while advancing collaborative aspirations,

- Building structures to enable high performing teams,
- The potential mechanisms for action-orientated governance.

Feature Case Study: A Story of Trust Restoration

The feature case study of Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ) is an illustration of deliberate renewal from a place of low public mandate. Focused around the participation in the He Waka Eke Noa collaboration and the following few years. It is included as a recent example of large-scale trust being eroded through members perceived loss of transparency and accountability by the organisation.

The study explores the deliberate actions B+LNZ have taken to regain their mandate from levy payers. This was driven by the board in response to member dissent and included:

- Active engagement from the very top to the very bottom of the hierarchy,
- Acknowledging the problem,
- Being willing to change and demonstrating evidence of that change,
- A strategic refresh and reaffirming the commitment to farmers,
- A significant change to the delivery model of extension.

This study provides an example of how easily trust is eroded but able to be regained through intentional actions. The inclusion of this example has been approved as an accurate account of events by B+LNZ senior staff.

Survey Process and Data Collection

The online survey was completed using the Qualtrics survey tool. The questions were framed to seek what farmers and rural community members expect from their representatives and directly aligned with the critical aspects that the literature review highlighted.

These included:

- Their perception of representation effectiveness,
- How well aligned they perceived their rural governors,
- Their views on trustworthiness,
- How impactful they perceived their governors in delivering on their needs.

The initial questions asked the respondents to self-identify their involvement in governance and rural community and their age. The intent was to enable the researcher to understand if the responders were spread across:

- Diverse age range,
- Roles within the business and those not directly farming,
- Across sector.

Those people not involved in a catchment community or from a rural community, were excluded from completing the survey, no data was collected to identify individuals.

The survey was shared via email, text, messenger apps and social media across the authors networks including the Wairoa and Hawke's Bay region, across Eastern North Island Beef + Lamb New Zealand Farmer Council and the B+LNZ Environmental Reference Group, members of the Kellogg community were invited to complete and share with their networks. The survey was able to be completed with ease on a smart phone or computer, but no paper copies were produced.

The survey had 64 respondents, who all acknowledged the Kellogg approved Consent before proceeding with the questionnaire.

Collation of the survey data and graphing of results was automatically produced by Qualtrics before analysis and interpretation of the results was made. The questions can be found as [Appendix B](#).

Interviews and the Interview Process

The interviewees were selected to represent a spread across the rural governance hierarchy. Specific representation of the following was captured via the interviews:

- National Rural Board members
- Chair of National Industry body
- Chair of Regional entities
- Chair of Iwi Māori incorporation
- Catchment Group governors
- Catchment Group Collective Chair
- National Catchment Group board member

All interviewees signed a Kellogg approved Consent Form.

Seven interviews were conducted to collect information from governors. These interviews were conducted via TEAMS to reduce the time burden. The interviews were recorded and transcribed via the website tools. Each interview typically lasted 40-60 minutes, the interview questions can be found as [Appendix A](#).

The interviews were conducted as a guided conversation, with the interviewer introducing questions naturally as the discussion unfolded. Responses were not sought if concepts had already been addressed elsewhere in the interview. Interviewees were informed that their perspectives would be used in the Kellogg Rural Leaders Project, represented as overall themes rather than attributed comments. After drafting the interview findings chapter, the researcher provided the draft to all interviewees for their awareness and to check the accuracy and interpretation of their views, some feedback was received and adjustments were made in response.

The findings from the interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach to interpret the conversations. Interviewees are identified only by Governor number (e.g., G.1, G.2) to maintain confidentiality and focus on collective insights.

8 Findings

8.1 Summary of Survey Findings

The questionnaire results offer a snapshot of how rural people experience governance and what they expect from those who represent them. My intention was to use this tool to balance the governance interview insights with a more grassroots perspective. In practice, the respondent profile meant this balance was only partly achieved, and on reflection, speaking directly with a number of grounded farmers outside governance roles may have surfaced different or sharper views.

Data Set Robustness and Respondent Profile

The survey was completed by 64 respondents, representing a broad spectrum of roles. The largest group, comprising 68%, were actively farming as their primary occupation or living on farms while supporting part-time roles. The age distribution of respondents formed a well-balanced bell curve, with 50% falling within the 46-60 year range. This aligns closely with the average age profile of the food and fibre workforce, as reported by RNZ (2024).

This dataset provides a foundation for discussing perspectives from rural communities. However, the data may be somewhat influenced by the fact that a significant portion of respondents also hold governance roles, including positions on catchment group committees. This variety of involvements could mean respondents may be balancing multiple perspectives, which may affect the lens through which they provide their insights and responses. While the intention was to capture clearer insights from those being governed, this group is inherently difficult to reach and often reluctant to participate in surveys, making it challenging to determine the extent to which this objective was met.

It is unsurprising that those who took the time to complete the survey were actively engaged in multiple leadership roles within their communities. Table 6 below illustrates the diverse range of roles identified.

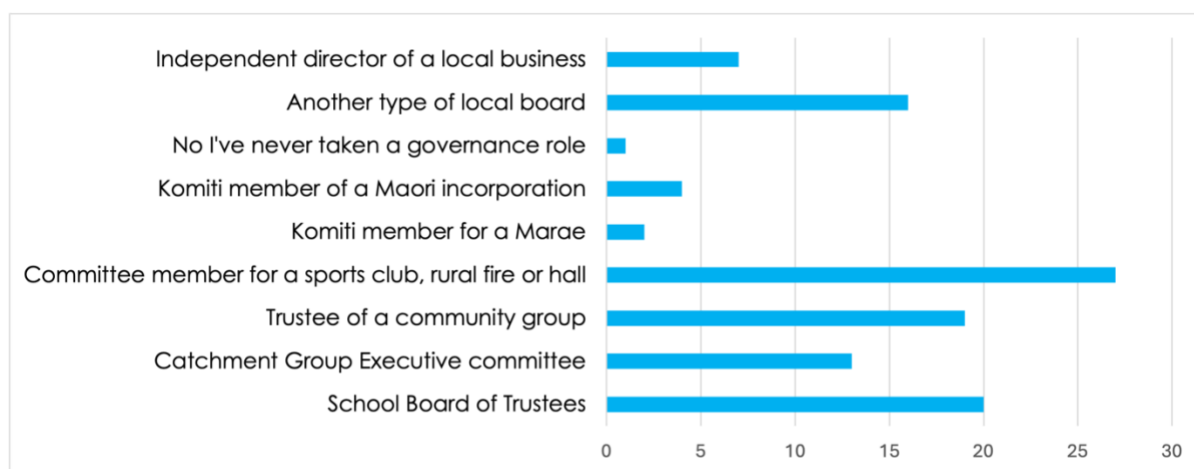


Figure 5: Results of question 3. Are you or have you previously been in a governance role representing your community? Tick as many as are relevant.

Local Governors frequently hold multiple roles as both leaders and active participants. Typically, these community groups operate as management boards, voluntarily delivering services on behalf of the wider community.

Notably, 92% of respondents across the data, felt that their voices were heard by local decision-makers at the community level. This may reflect a self-reinforcing dynamic, where the anticipation of being heard encouraged participation in the survey.

Influence and Roles in Strategic Planning and Implementation

The next set of questions examined which members had the greatest influence on planning and directing deliverables. The survey distinguished between the committee and the broader membership in the response options. While responses varied, the committee and chairperson were most frequently identified as the primary drivers of strategic direction. However, when asked who had the most impact on implementing these outcomes and managing work on the ground, the coordinator emerged as the key figure, surpassing even the wider group.

Notably, across both questions, the finance role was not perceived as instrumental. This may be because members often view the coordinator as the primary agent responsible for securing financial resources through funding applications, whereas the finance person is typically seen as overseeing the accounts.

Key Themes on Communication Challenges and Facilitators

The following question set asked respondents to focus on communication between leadership groups and the wider catchment community.

When asked about their own responsiveness to practical requests such as RSVPs, 65% reported replying promptly. Another 57% said they engaged quickly when invited to 'have their say,' while 30% responded occasionally and 13% only when strongly motivated. No one reported rarely

replying or being unsure how to respond, suggesting that practical barriers are low and motivation or competing priorities drive responsiveness.

A similar pattern appeared around connection. Forty percent felt their local group stayed well connected with them and represented them effectively, while 55% said this was sometimes difficult and 5% felt it was nearly impossible. This reflects the multiple roles that rural people juggle and the reality that local groups are trusted but stretched.

Communication challenges were shaped as much by capacity as by technology. The most consistent barrier was time: people balancing farm work, jobs, and volunteer roles described delayed replies, missed messages, and a sense of 'chasing each other up'. Digital tools help, but they don't overcome limited bandwidth or different communication preferences. As one respondent noted, sometimes the answer isn't another email but a phone call or face-to-face conversation.

Informal interactions; coffee catch-ups, social gatherings, casual conversations were noted as the most effective way to maintain momentum and clarity. Structural challenges still influence engagement, including patchy internet, long distances, and the personal cost of participation. While infrastructure has improved, engagement still spikes most when frustration or dissatisfaction pushes people to act, reinforcing that motivation remains the key driver.

One respondent also noted that internal dynamics can hinder representation, with some groups dominated by a few influential individuals or becoming overly politically correct, potentially sidelining broader community voices.

Together, these insights highlight the complexity of communication and representation in rural governance, pointing to both structural barriers and practical ways to strengthen community connection.

Perceptions of Representation Drift

The dataset now shifts to focus on representation drift, the perceptions of governance groups that are more removed from the local communities such as Regional and national sector groups. The data trend indicates a shift from the earlier near-universal sense of being heard at the local level to a more tempered experience at regional or national levels, with 79% of respondents reporting that their voices are only sometimes heard and their views accurately represented by these broader governance bodies.

Questions exploring whether regional and national groups sought community opinions on planning and whether those opinions were genuinely considered revealed that "sometimes" was the most common response. Notably, when asked if these broader governance bodies acknowledged and shared their mistakes, 50% of respondents indicated that this had never occurred and expressed scepticism that it ever would. This finding highlights a significant level of mistrust towards these organisations.

When asked what fosters trust in representatives, (Figure 7.), 74% of respondents pointed to proven results as the strongest driver, closely followed by honesty; including being upfront when the news isn't good. Personal familiarity and being recognised as a high-performing farmer also

strengthened trust, underscoring the importance of relatability. Several respondents noted that knowing representatives beyond their formal roles, especially when they come from the same or neighbouring districts, made their leadership feel more credible and grounded.

Notably, factors such as age, gender, holding prestigious positions, or adopting the “look” of a farmer were not considered important. This distinction reinforces a clear preference for authenticity and demonstrated capability over superficial signals of belonging.

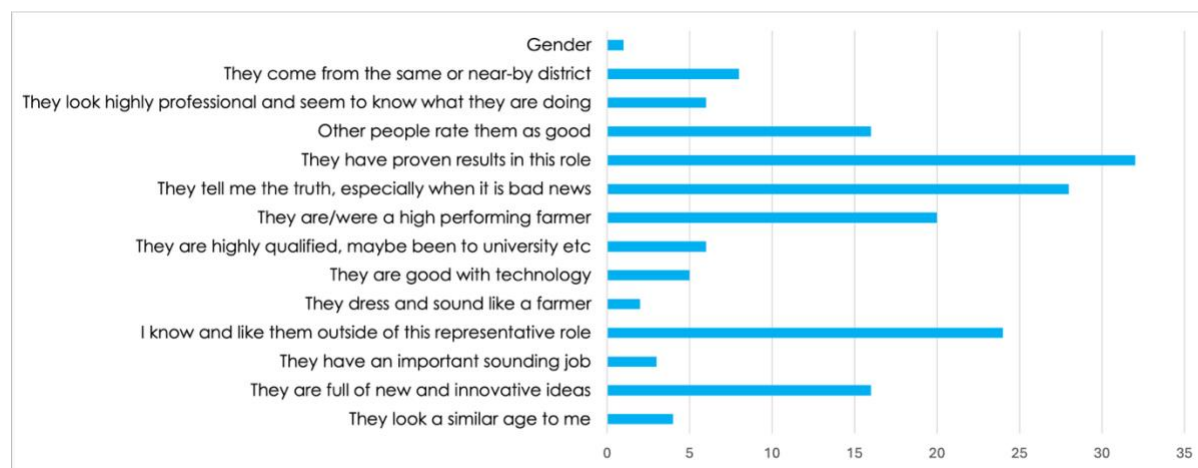


Figure 6: Shows the responses for the drivers of trust. Responders were asked to choose the key things that make you trust a representative.

Community Perspectives on Governance Challenges

The final ‘Tell me anything I should know’ question drew a wide range of reflections that deepened the picture of rural governance from a community perspective.

A strong theme was the value of direct, personal contact over impersonal communication, with one respondent simply stating, “communication is key!” Capacity constraints and volunteer fatigue were common, reflecting busy lives and limited governance experience. As one person noted, “A lot of people hang back and let the loudest do the work, not necessarily the most skilled.” Others highlighted the importance of cultural and regional nuances, calling for practical, boots-on-the-ground leadership that reflects local sentiment. “Farmer-led steering or focus groups generally reflect regional sentiment best,” one respondent said. Many also stressed the need for adequate support, especially funding for coordinators: “High-level funding for coordinators to do the heavy lifting meant volunteers could be most effective.”

Structural and bureaucratic barriers were also front of mind, including misalignment between local and central government and ongoing funding challenges. One respondent observed, “They often listen but do not hear... they interpret what you say from their perspective, not yours.” Another added, “Not everyone’s voice is equal; some are experts, and some think they are experts.”

Issues of diversity and inclusion surfaced too, with some groups feeling overshadowed or underrepresented. Māori corporations were noted as facing unique pressures in balancing

shareholder expectations with long-term goals. As one respondent put it, success requires “bringing your owners with you” and staying focused on both the journey and the destination.

8.2 Survey Findings Insights

The community-facing Survey findings reveal three central themes that highlight the challenges and opportunities within rural governance. Firstly, from the community perspective, communication and accountability emerge as foundational to building and sustaining trust. Effective leadership relies on transparent, responsive communication and direct, personal engagement. Informal interactions and practical, boots-on-the-ground approaches foster genuine community connection and strengthen accountability. People want to feel connected and have the ability to influence their leaders.

Second, trust diminishes as representation moves further from the local level. While local governance groups are generally perceived as accessible and responsive, trust notably declines at regional and national levels.

Finally, rural communities are complex and dynamic, characterized by diverse capacities, perspectives, and needs. Assumptions about what these communities want or require risk oversimplification. People want their leaders to be authentic and listen with real understanding to their concerns.

Together, these themes underscore the necessity for rural governance to provide leadership that is connected, accountable, and responsive to the unique and evolving contexts of rural communities, fostering trust and effective representation across all levels of representation.

8.3 Findings: Governor Interviews

It was interesting that across the interviews, governors from different sectors and backgrounds expressed remarkably consistent views about what strengthens rural governance. Six themes stood out, with a clear shared purpose emerging as the anchor for everything that follows.

Purpose Drives Effective Governance

Governors consistently described clear purpose as the foundation of strong leadership. Participants emphasised that purpose must add value to individuals while ultimately serving a broader community good, extending beyond single projects or short-term wins, which strongly aligns with the literature. Purpose provides direction, legitimacy, and alignment, helping groups stay strategic rather than becoming absorbed in delivery. A purpose that is both visionary and achievable was seen as essential for long-term commitment and community trust.

Long-term, Values-led Leadership Matters

Governors spoke openly about the complexities of rural communities, where a small number of people often carry multiple responsibilities across organisations; this creates pressure, fatigue, and at times unproductive local politics.

Interviewees emphasised the need for leaders who think beyond immediate pressures and hold a steady course through turnover, funding cycles, and shifting priorities. Many drew on Māori worldviews to illustrate how long horizons lift governance above personalities “the waka continues even if people and projects come and go.”

Governance Capability is Critical

Governors highlighted the importance of strong governance capability, clarity of roles, preparation, discipline, and confidence. Yet capability varies widely, and formal upskilling options are limited outside national industry bodies. Informal mentoring and targeted training were seen as valuable ways to strengthen performance and reduce reliance on a small number of experienced individuals. Several interviewees noted that an independent chair can help balance local knowledge with external expertise and cut through minor issues that might otherwise derail progress.

Alongside this, several governors who also serve in industry level entities noted that the formal governance training they had received through organisations such as B+LNZ, Dairy NZ, and SummerfruitNZ had been invaluable. They believed similar training would deliver significant dividends for rural Catchment Groups, lifting individual confidence, strengthening board performance, and ultimately improving outcomes for the projects and communities they serve.

A clear separation between governance and project delivery was viewed as essential. When governors slip into operational work, strategic priority is lost and burnout increases. A genuine focus on “the job to be done” rather than the status of the position, highlighted the need for respect for the role and for the discipline of governance itself, noting that adequate preparation and due diligence prevented meetings from becoming overly long or dominated by procedural detail.

Strong administrative support, especially in communications, finance, and record-keeping was identified as a critical enabler of good governance in volunteer-heavy rural contexts.

Skilled, paid, specialist staff should carry the operational load without disempowering volunteers, ensuring governors can remain focused on strategy and representation.

Communication is Foundational and Must be Two-way

Governors described communication as the backbone of trust. Interviewees reinforced the importance of visionaries who can imagine new possibilities and super communicators who can share the project’s narrative in an engaging way. Effective communication is clear, repeated, transparent, and tailored to different audiences. It must flow in all directions; up from members, down from governors, and across to stakeholders. Being present in community spaces, listening well, and demonstrating genuine care were seen as essential to ensuring messages land and members feel heard.

Sustainable Governance

Governors repeatedly emphasised that enjoyment is a critical ingredient in sustaining voluntary leadership. They spoke about the need to feel that their contribution is worthwhile, respected, and

making a difference, especially in the unpaid landscape of Catchment Groups. Several governors described the genuine pleasure of coming together as a board, sharing kai, a few laughs, and the warmth of good company around the edges of robust discussion, as an important part of what keeps them committed.

Governance Succession

Many governance roles lack a clear succession plan. Without this, there is genuine risk that people may be reluctant to step into roles, others may be excluded from opportunities. It was highlighted that a degree of turn-over is healthy, arguing that leaders should actively work to replace themselves to ensure continuity and avoid stagnation. Succession planning and fixed terms reduce the burden, creating space for new voices and building a community expectation that governance is shared over time. This aspect should be considered for inclusion in the agreed structure.

Together, these findings show that rural governance is strongest when it is purpose-anchored, values-led, well-supported, and grounded in genuine human connection. Purpose provides the compass; capability, communication, and identity provide the momentum. Governors saw their role not just as decision-makers but as stewards of both the group itself and the leadership culture that encourages others to step forward.

9 Discussion

9.1 Interpreting the Evidence

The following discussion shifts from what was said to what these insights mean. Across the literature, interviews, and survey responses, a clear pattern emerges: rural catchment governance is strongest when it is purpose-anchored, supported by effective leadership, and enabled by capability, communication, and trust. The following sections interpret these themes and outline what is required for governance that is not only functional, but enduring.

The Gap Between Recommended Practice and Rural Reality

Governance literature emphasises capability-based leadership and structured systems. However, the reality emerging from this research shows a starkly different pattern. Rural governance often forms organically, leadership roles are inherited by those already serving on multiple committees, reflecting deep commitment but also revealing a structural vulnerability; leadership is assumed rather than intentionally developed. Furthermore, in small communities, with a limited volunteer pool, a handful of people carry multiple responsibilities while many remain passive observers. This creates a fragility that, if unaddressed, becomes a fault line in catchment governance.

Mismatch Between Responsibility and Capability

Catchment governors hold significant responsibilities, often without fully realising the weight of them. Effective governance requires compliance obligations, risk management, financial oversight, stakeholder negotiation, and long-term strategy. Yet formal governance training is rare, capability is often assumed rather than built. This mismatch exposes groups to poor decision-making, burnout, blurred accountability, and loss of credibility with funders and communities. It is not simply a technical gap; it is a personal and governance risk.

Invisible Work that Enables Delivery

The familiar frustration of “too much hui, not enough do-ee” often reflects a misunderstanding of what governance actually involves. Much of the governors' work is invisible, setting direction, managing risk, securing funding, building relationships, and keeping the group aligned, yet these tasks are the critical enablers of every project that later becomes visible on the ground. When this work is dismissed as ‘just talking’, it not only misrepresents the effort required but also undermines governors' confidence and enjoyment in their roles. Over time, this derogatory view can erode pride in good governance practice and discourage capable people from stepping forward, further risking good representation and diversity of thought. Without governance work being done well, the practical delivery of outcomes that communities value, simply cannot happen.

Purpose as the Strategic North Star

Across all data sources, the message has been clear: without an effective purpose, ‘there is no point in existing’. Purpose provides mandate, legitimacy, and direction. It must be explicit, community-anchored, and expressed in plain language that resonates. When purpose is

embedded into every discussion, it becomes the guardrail for decisions and the backbone of accountability.

Long-term purpose must be broken into achievable steps; five, ten, or thirty years so progress can be demonstrated while staying aligned with the overarching vision, although this creates a significant tension with short term funding cycles. This balance builds trust and momentum by showing that each step contributes meaningfully to the long-term goal. Interviewees noted that rural governance often becomes reactive and short-term, with fatigue and politics undermining long-term focus. Māori worldviews such as 'walking into the future backwards' offer a counterbalance, encouraging governance that honours intergenerational horizons.

Lasting the Long Game Framework

The NZ Landcare Trust offers a practical example of purpose-anchored, community-led governance. Its 'lasting the long game' approach shows how clear purpose, skilled coordination, and strong relationships sustain groups over time. This model reinforces several themes from this research: capability matters, support structures reduce burnout, communication must be two-way, and trust is built through consistency and connection. A more detailed summary is provided in [Appendix D](#).

Te Pae Tawhiti Exemplar

The Wakatū Incorporation's Te Pae Tawhiti 500-year vision provides a powerful example of a framework in action. While its whakapapa-based mandate is unique, the underlying principle is universal: governance is strongest when guided by long-term thinking, shared values, and a purpose that outlasts individual personalities. This stands in sharp contrast to the short funding cycles and reactive pressures many rural groups face. A more substantial exemplar summary is provided in [Appendix E](#).

Trust as the Currency of Catchment Governance

Trust underpins participation, mandate, and social licence. It is built through consistent behaviour, visible progress, and respectful relationships. Governors must invest in relational work, the 'cuppa in peacetime' used as the scaffold to build resilience before pressure arrives.

Trust is strengthened when:

- Purpose is clear.
- Roles are understood.
- Communication is honest.
- Commitments are kept.
- Members feel represented.

Without trust, contributions risk being wasted. With trust, collective effort becomes possible.

Beef + Lamb New Zealand Case Study

The Beef + Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ) experience with He Waka Eke Noa Collaboration offers a clear illustration of how trust can be strained, when governance and mandate fall out of alignment. Farmer dissatisfaction with B+LNZ's role in HWEN, expressed through remits, roadshow feedback, and leadership change, highlighted the importance of genuine representation and transparent engagement.

In response, B+LNZ undertook a strategic refresh, strengthened its advocacy, and re-affirmed its purpose around being 'By farmers. For farmers.' As the organisation listened more actively and communicated more openly, trust gradually began to recover. This case demonstrates that even when confidence is shaken, deliberate actions; listening, accountability, and visible responsiveness, can restore Social Licence and strengthen the relationship between governors and those they serve. A more comprehensive version of this case study is provided in [Appendix C](#) for readers who want deeper insight into trust restoration in governance.

Communication Is the Lifeblood of Trust and Mandate

Communication emerged as one of the strongest themes across all evidence sources. Effective communication is:

- Transparent.
- Multi-channelled.
- Repeated.
- Tailored to diverse audiences.
- Honest about both progress and challenges.

Face-to-face engagement remains vital in rural contexts. Communication must flow up from members, down from governors, and across to stakeholders. When communication falters, trust erodes quickly.

The B+LNZ case study provides a powerful illustration of how easily trust can be damaged when communication and mandate become misaligned and how deliberate transparency and engagement can rebuild it.

The Human Side: Motivation and Enjoyment

Governance ultimately relies on the people who choose to serve. While boards that 'look and feel' like their communities build trust more naturally, motivation comes from meaningful work, connection, enjoyment, and the sense that contributions matter. Enjoyment such as shared kai, relational warmth, pride in progress sustains commitment.

10 Conclusion

Governance Essentials Emerging

This research set out to understand what strengthens or strains rural catchment governance, drawing on literature, interviews with governors, and a survey of farmers and landowners. Across all three evidence streams, the message was consistent: effective catchment governance depends on clear purpose, capability, trust, and structures that support people to lead well. The following conclusions outline the essential conditions required for enduring, community-anchored governance.

Foundational Framework

Most Catchment Groups across New Zealand are struggling without the structures needed to support effective governance, and many are repeatedly forced to repeatedly 'reinvent-the-wheel'. Even more concerning are the groups losing passionate leaders or failing to reach their potential because their governance is not scaffolded by a solid foundational framework. The Lasting the Long Game Framework developed by NZ Landcare Trust offers a pathway for groups to shape their own long-term direction, while Wakatū Incorporation's Te Pae Tawhiti demonstrates how a community-anchored vision can be brought to life through clearly defined pou. Yet because every Catchment Group is as unique as the community it represents, a nationally led response is needed to ensure consistency, equity, and access to support.

Effective Leadership Structures

Enduring governance requires operating structures that provide clarity of roles, expectations, and processes. The evidence shows that groups benefit from:

- agreed governance and operational separation.
- clear role descriptions.
- induction packs.
- fixed terms and succession planning.
- written behavioural expectations.
- measures of success aligned to the role.

These structures reduce confusion, support transitions, and strengthen legitimacy. They also help groups evolve at the speed of trust, rather than rushing decisions or relying on personalities.

Governance Capability is Critical

The research revealed a persistent mismatch between the complex governance responsibilities Catchment Groups hold and the capability available to meet them. Effective governance requires regulatory literacy, risk management, financial oversight, and strategic thinking yet formal training is rare, and capability is often assumed rather than built.

Intentional capability development is essential. This includes:

- targeted governance training

- mentoring and peer support
- independent chairs or co-opted members to balance local dynamics
- induction processes for new governors

An important and often challenging aspect of rural governance is ensuring that the right talent is included. As discussed earlier, there is a trend for rural governance to be formed organically rather than deliberately, which exposes the group to potential deficits of skills and risk of limited diversity of thought. Groups need to be aware of this potential shortfall and actively plan their structure to counter its occurrence. Utilising proven models developed for high performing teams could help provide the much-needed operating framework. The included example of the Rocket Model, Curphy & Hogan (2012) helpfully suggest that the goals and purpose of the team should determine who is on the team.

Purpose Must Anchor Everything

Across the evidence, purpose emerges as the strategic north star. Groups with a clear, community-anchored purpose are more aligned, more resilient, and better able to navigate turnover, funding cycles, and competing pressures. A clear purpose provides mandate, legitimacy, and direction, and without it, groups drift or lose community confidence.

Trust

Trust is intentionally built on clarity, visible progress, and inclusive decision-making. Strong reciprocal relationships can be crafted by people who deliberately listen rather than assume, take the necessary time to connect with people at place and are responsive to their priorities. In rural contexts, where reputation carries significant weight, the ability to demonstrate progress and articulate clear processes towards the agreed purpose, support the social licence that Catchment Groups depend on.

Communication and engagement are the lifeblood of trust. It must be transparent, multi-channel, tailored, and honest about both progress and challenges. Digital tools help, but face-to-face engagement remains essential. Members need to feel connected to their organisation and privy to the 'real stories' and insights. Communication must flow up, down, and across the system.

People Sustain Governance

Effective catchment governance endures when people feel valued, supported, and connected to the work. This research shows that the human dimension of governance is not an optional extra but a core determinant of long-term success. When groups create conditions where governors feel respected, understand their contribution, and see clear pathways for others to step forward, participation becomes sustainable rather than fragile. Strengthening the culture around governance, through recognition, support, and deliberate succession ensures that leadership is continually renewed and that communities remain confident in those who represent them.

Action Orientated Governance

Across literature, interviews, and the questionnaire, the evidence is clear; effective catchment governance is not accidental. It requires purpose-anchored leadership, deliberate capability development, clear structures, strong communication, and a deep commitment to building trust and relationships. When these conditions are in place, Catchment Groups can move beyond well-meaning discussions, to deliver enduring outcomes that serve both current and future generations.

11 Recommendations

To strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of Catchment Groups, coordinated action is required across national support structures, governance practice, membership behaviour, and government funding. A strong national framework provides the bones; governors shape it; members activate it; government enables it. The newly formed Catchment Communities Aotearoa is best placed to lead this critical work and ensure that all groups, regardless of size or location, have access to the frameworks and capability support required to succeed.

11.1 Recommendations for Catchment Communities Aotearoa

Lead a National Governance Capability System

Act as the national backbone organisation for rural governance and leadership capability. A coordinated national system would reduce duplication, improve quality, and ensure rural communities have access to the tools and training they need.

Resource a Foundational Capability Framework

Develop a national capability framework template and library of basic options that could be adopted and modified to suit different group needs which lifts the baseline while preserving local autonomy. A hybrid funding model; open-access basics plus member-only or paid tiers would balance equity with sustainability.

Develop Future Leadership Pathways

Lead the development of rural leadership pathways, including:

- Personal development.
- Governance mentoring.
- Succession planning.
- Cultural competence.
- Conflict navigation.
- Strategic thinking.

This strengthens long-term resilience and ensures emerging leaders are well prepared for rural and place-based governance.

11.2 Key Recommendations for CCA

- National backbone role: Provide coordinated, high-quality governance and leadership capability nationwide.
- Governance & leadership training: Develop foundational through to advanced modules delivered through a structured national programme.
- Hybrid funding model: Offer open-access basics plus member-only or paid tiers for deeper capability support.
- Template & toolkit library: Provide induction packs, meeting guides, strategic planning templates, and review frameworks.
- Expert facilitation pool: Maintain a vetted panel of specialists for planning, governance reviews, and capability building.
- Knowledge Hub: Curate research, case studies, exemplars, and practical tools.
- Future leadership development: Provide training in personal development, communication, conflict navigation, and strategic thinking.
- Succession pathways: Identify and support emerging leaders early, normalising capability development.
- Mentors Lab: Facilitate a structured mentoring forum for chairs, coordinators, and emerging leaders.
- Mentoring the mentors: Develop a rural governance standards framework to ensure consistent, credible support across the network.

CCA is well placed to set and maintain the national 'capability table' providing consistent governance tools, training, and support for all Catchment Groups.

11.3 Recommendations for Governors

Catchment group governors should use established governance frameworks to provide the scaffolding required for effective, consistent practice, and adapt these structures to reflect their community's purpose and context.

For groups that do not yet have these foundations in place, the need to act is urgent; operating without a framework increases risk, drains volunteer capacity, and limits the outcomes communities can achieve. For emerging groups, once values are aligned, it is critical to begin with a strong framework so the governance table is set well from the outset; ensuring clarity, stability, and the conditions for long-term community value.

Have a Clear Purpose and Strategic Direction

Governors must anchor their work in a shared, community-good purpose that resonates widely and endures beyond individual projects or personalities. Purpose should be explicit, plain-language, and embedded into every discussion and decision. A clear purpose provides mandate, legitimacy, and direction; the strategic north star that keeps groups aligned and accountable.

Allocate Funding to the Mechanics of the Group

Governance cannot function without the right support. Groups must budget deliberately for the mechanics that enable good governance, as a minimum these should include specialist expertise in:

- Administration.
- Communications.
- Coordination and facilitation.

These are specialist roles, not optional extras. Governors should ensure project applications include dedicated funding for these functions and seek additional resourcing where needed. This investment reduces burnout, strengthens capability, and protects strategic focus.

Commit to and Enable Governance Development

High-quality governance requires continual learning. Governors must fully understand the complexity of the requirements of the role and the personal and business risks they face as governors and ensure they are appropriately skilled to meet these demands. Create a foundational expectation that capability development is part of the role and part of the culture. This includes:

- Securing training for governors and emerging leaders.
- Embedding mentoring, both formal and informal.
- Planning for succession, including fixed terms.
- Maintaining strategic planning and review cycles.
- Communicating to members why governance capability matters.

Create Explicit Expectations

Governors should work together to develop clear job descriptions, behavioural expectations, and agreed processes. These should be written, understood, and reviewed regularly. Clarity reduces confusion, strengthens accountability, and supports smooth transitions.

Practical steps include:

- Developing a “prenup”; a co-designed set of expectations with members.
- Ensuring individuals either have, or can learn, the required skills.
- Holding governors and members accountable for their respective responsibilities.
- Celebrating good governance as visibly as project delivery.

11.4 Key Recommendations for Governors

Governors are responsible for adapting and shaping a framework into a fit-for-purpose local operating system.

- Utilise and tailor the templates; shape the national framework into a local expression of community aspirations and purpose.
- Establish clear purpose and direction; maintain a strong, shared purpose that guides long-term strategy and engagement.
- Fund core operational capability; resource essential specialist roles, at a minimum include administration, coordination, communications.
- Invest in governance capability; ongoing training, mentoring, succession planning, and structured development.
- Set and enforce clear expectations; formalise roles, responsibilities, and accountability to distribute workload fairly.

Governors bring the framework and structures to life and ensure the table can carry the weight of the work.

11.5 Recommendations for the New Zealand Government

The Crown has expressed strong rhetorical support for Catchment Groups, but financial and structural support has not consistently kept pace with expectations. To enable Catchment Groups to deliver long-term outcomes for the hard-to-solve problems facing Aotearoa New Zealand. The government should:

Provide Long-term Funding Models

Catchment Groups largely work on environmental and community challenges that unfold over decades, not election cycles. Across-party, long-term funding enables groups to plan strategically, retain skilled coordinators, invest in capability, and avoid the boom-and-bust cycle that undermines momentum. It signals that the Crown understands the time horizons required for climate resilience, and community-led environmental action.

Fund at a Level that Amplify Aspirations

Farmers and landowners are already investing time, money, and effort into environmental and community stewardship. Government funding should accelerate this commitment, enabling communities to scale up what they are already doing and to innovate locally. This is about partnership: resourcing communities to deliver outcomes that benefit all New Zealanders both present, and future.

Adequately Resource Catchment Communities Aotearoa

CCA is uniquely positioned to deliver national governance training, templates, mentoring, and shared services. Resourcing CCA properly would lift the baseline across the entire movement, reduce duplication, and ensure that every group, regardless of postcode has access to high-quality governance capability. This is a strategic investment in national consistency and community empowerment.

Design Reporting Frameworks that Drive Good Outcomes

The complex one-size-fits-all approach to contract establishment, risks wasting resources and missing opportunities. Proportionally right sized contracts and reporting should ensure rigor and suitable accountability but not drain volunteer capacity. Fit-for-purpose frameworks focus on meaningful indicators, reduce administrative burden, and avoid unnecessary complexity. Good reporting systems help groups tell their story, demonstrate impact, and maintain trust with funders and communities.

These actions would strengthen national consistency, reduce burnout, and support enduring community-led governance.

11.6 Key Recommendations for the Crown

Government's role is financial enablement: ensuring the system has the resources to function.

- Provide long-term funding models that match long-term environmental horizons.
- Fund at a level that amplifies outcomes on behalf of all New Zealanders.
- Resource CCA adequately to deliver governance training and national support.
- Design contract and reporting frameworks that drive good outcomes without draining volunteer capacity.

Government funding stabilises the system so communities can focus on outcomes, not survival.

11.7 Recommendations for Members

Members are not passive recipients, they are co-governors of the system. Their behaviour strengthens or weakens the governance table, through participation in governance members activate the whole ecosystem, ensuring great outcomes for their communities.

- Share responsibility: strong governance relies on active, accountable participation.
- Engage consistently: communicate, respond, and contribute constructively.
- Strengthen representation: participate in policy engagement, submissions, and leadership pipelines.
- Develop future leaders: identify and support emerging leaders.

Members activate the purpose and keep the governance table grounded in community reality.

Practical Actions for Members

Members hold a critical share of the collective mandate. Governance is strengthened when members show up, speak up, and take their responsibilities seriously. Complacency weakens outcomes and places unfair pressure on a small number of committed individuals.

This shows up as active participation:

- Reply to emails.
- RSVP to events.
- Communicate early when plans change.
- Ask coordinators where support is most needed.
- Turn up to events prepared.
- Provide insights through surveys and other 'have your say' opportunities.

In small rural communities, these behaviours materially affect momentum and morale.

Members strengthen governance when they value governance processes, participate consistently, and encourage others to do the same. Catchment Groups are fertile ground for developing future governors. Members should support and uplift those with leadership potential; the super communicators, relationship builders, and steady hands. Rural communities cannot afford passive governance; active involvement ensures structures reflect the realities and aspirations of those who live and work on the land.

In essence, Catchment Communities Aotearoa becomes the national table where capability is set, replenished, and shared. A table where every catchment group can pull up a chair and access the tools, training, and confidence needed to govern well. The table may be national, but the nourishment is designed to strengthen local hands. This metaphor aligns with CCA's goals of collaboration, empowerment, and systems-level support, while providing a clear pathway to operationalise those aspirations at scale.

12 Closing the Analogy

The Craft of Setting the Table Well

Governance is a moveable feast, encompassing the idea that capability, culture and responsibility travel with people into every room they enter. How the table is set and who is invited to dine matters. The success of the meal ensures that people return with enthusiasm and energy and continue to do so for generations to come. How might we use this analogy to illustrate an approach to getting governance right?

- **Occasion = Purpose** The occasion is the big purpose for which everyone gathers: the nourishment of the whole community. It is the reason the table is set, the guests are invited, and the menu is designed.
- **Table = Structures** The table is the governance framework; sturdy scaffolding that supports good decisions. It holds the weight of conversations, responsibilities, and outcomes, ensuring fairness and durability.
- **Guest List = Governors** The guests seated at the table are the governors. The guest list is carefully curated and will change over time, but each is deliberately invited and has a place and a role in shaping decisions. Their presence reflects representation, and their participation ensures governance remains connected to the community.
- **Menu = The projects and deliverables** The menu shows the steps towards the shared purpose. It anchors the gathering in action, ensuring that while individual dishes may vary, the overall meal sustains the collective. The projects and successes enrich the enthusiasm and power the momentum towards the agreed purpose.
- **Courses = Steps to Achieve Outcomes** The different courses represent the milestones towards achieving the purpose. Each dish contributes to the overall feast, just as each initiative contributes to the broader vision.
- **Cutlery = Tools** The cutlery represents the tools and resources that enable governors to participate effectively. These include governance training, mentoring, communication systems, funding and professional support. Without the right tools, even the best menu and table cannot deliver the meal.

Together, they illustrate that governance must remain firmly anchored in community purpose while adapting to the realities of participation and change.

Closing statement:

Much of the issues we are experiencing are a symptom of limited civic education, which is a national problem that becomes more pronounced in rural areas due to lower population numbers. Across Aotearoa New Zealand, falling voter turnout, low submission rates, and minimal responses to consultation requests weaken the quality of decisions that affect us all.

Aotearoa would benefit from clearer, more accessible pathways for everyday people to understand their role and influence in civic processes. Rural communities, in particular, have an opportunity to lean into leadership, deepen our understanding of what good governance looks like at every level, and recognise the positive impact this has on outcomes that genuinely matter.

13 References

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Appendices

Appendix A

Semi Structured Interview questions: for governors

1. What do you think helps governance/leadership groups truly represent their members? Are any of these things absolutely necessary or deal-breakers?
2. Can you share any examples where you've seen governance groups do this really well?
3. Do you know of any groups that make sure different types of members have a seat at the table? For example, different kinds of farms, land sizes, mana whenua, or special skills? Why did they do this, and did it work? Do they have other types of members, like independent ones?
4. What makes a governance/leadership group or committee work well? Have you seen any rural groups offer training to help members govern better? What did that look like?
5. Do you know of any groups that work deliberately to keep their boards motivated and fresh, what do they do? For example, by planning for new leaders or rotating roles?
6. How do boards keep governors updated on what members want and need? How often do they do this, and how does it change their work? Do they share their plans and priorities back with members?
7. What challenges do governance groups face when trying to represent different member interests? How have they dealt with these challenges?
8. How do governance groups balance including everyone with making decisions efficiently? Are there trade-offs, and how do they manage them?

Appendix B

Survey Questions for Catchment Group Members

Please answer each question by selecting how often you experience or feel the following, using this scale: Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Always.

1. How often do you feel leadership committee's like: Catchment group, council, Beef + LambNZ etc represents your interests?
2. How often do you feel your voice is heard by the decision-making groups at regional or national levels?
3. How often do their projects or activities happening on the ground, reflect your needs or interests?
4. Do you know what the governance of these groups is focusing on?
5. How often do you feel the governance group understands your priorities?
6. How often do you raise concerns and get changes made?
7. How often are you asked for your opinions during planning?
8. How often do you feel your suggestions are listened to and acted upon?
9. How often have you seen changes happen because the committee heard new information?
10. How often does the governance committee openly share challenges or mistakes?

Appendix C

Case Study: A Story of Redemption

The Beef + Lamb New Zealand Response to He Waka Eke Noa

Background

Beef & Lamb New Zealand (B+LNZ) is a farmer-led industry body representing sheep and beef farmers across New Zealand. It operates on a bottom-up governance model, with farmers voluntarily supporting its work through levies collected at processing plants. Members elect representatives locally via the Farmer Council and nationally onto a formal Board.

The He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN) Primary Sector Partnership was a collaborative initiative involving industry groups, Māori/iwi organisations, and the New Zealand Government to design frameworks for measuring, managing, and pricing agricultural greenhouse gas emissions; a key driver of climate change (Ministry for Primary Industries, 2023). Many viewed HWEN as a significant step forward in collective action on climate change, reflecting a shared commitment to sustainability and innovation within the primary sector.

While the partnership faced challenges, it sparked important conversations about governance, representation, and trust within the farming community. Member feedback at the 2023 annual meeting highlighted the complexity of balancing diverse perspectives and the importance of ongoing engagement.

In response, B+LNZ undertook a strategic refresh to realign with its farmer base, reaffirming the tagline 'With farmers - for farmers' to reinforce its purpose and commitment to serving its members.

Organisational Change and Farmer Engagement

Farmer feedback regarding B+LNZ's role in HWEN was strongly reflected in remits tabled at the 2023 annual meeting. Remits specifically addressed HWEN, with nearly 49% of farmers voting in favour of exiting the partnership. This demonstrated the organisation's openness to hearing diverse views and the democratic nature of its governance. Publications such as Farmers Weekly reported on the robust debate among farmers, underscoring the sector's active engagement (Farmers Weekly, 2023).

Some farmers expressed concerns about representation within HWEN, perceiving the emissions reduction proposals as top-down and government-driven. These concerns were important signals for B+LNZ to enhance its advocacy and communication efforts, ensuring farmer voices are heard and valued (Smith & Jones, 2024).

Board Chair Andrew Morrison acknowledged that HWEN was a significant factor in his election loss, reflecting the organisation's accountability and responsiveness to member sentiment. In response, B+LNZ organised a nationwide roadshow to listen to farmer concerns. Newly elected Board Chair Kate Acland, recognised the legitimacy of these concerns and the need to improve advocacy and communication (Barrier, 2023).

This period highlighted the challenge for B+LNZ in balancing government collaboration with maintaining farmer trust, especially on complex issues like emissions pricing and regulatory change.

Following the strategic refresh, the B+LNZ Strategy 2024–2027 emphasises working closely with farmers to prioritise their needs and achieve a vision of thriving sheep and beef farmers now and into the future (B+LNZ, 2024).

The organisation has acknowledged the need to 'listen better' and has implemented changes through its extension programme, which supports farmer-led innovation groups and peer learning to adopt new tools, technologies, and management practices.

Emergence of New Collaborations and Positive Change

The governance challenges experienced during HWEN also inspired new grassroots movements such as the Groundswell group, which sought to represent farmers' interests in fresh ways. Groundswell was founded in 2020 by farmers motivated to engage constructively on regulatory and environmental issues, reflecting the sector's dynamic and evolving nature (Wallace, 2023; Campbell, 2023).

HWEN was disestablished by Cabinet in June 2024 due to political realignments and the need for new approaches. Concurrently, the Pasture Sector Group was formed to pursue similar goals, focusing on increased investment in research and practical tools to reduce on-farm emissions while protecting production. This transition illustrates the sector's resilience and commitment to continuous improvement (New Zealand Government, 2024).

Interestingly, the decline in Groundswell's support in recent times appears to parallel a gradual regaining of trust in B+LNZ among some farmers. As B+LNZ has taken proactive steps to engage more directly with farmers and address their concerns, many members have begun to re-engage with the organisation (Farmers Weekly, 2024; RNZ, 2025). This dynamic highlights the positive impact of transparent communication, authentic representation, and responsiveness in strengthening governance trust.

Appendix D

Exemplar 1. NZ Landcare Trust – Lasting the Long Game Framework

NZ Landcare Trust – *Lasting the Long Game Framework*

Overview New Zealand Landcare Trust is a national organisation that supports Catchment Groups and community-led environmental initiatives across Aotearoa. It has provided the Lasting the Long Game Framework as guidance for Catchment Group Planning.

Vision Through its framework, the Trust encourages Catchment Groups to move beyond short-term projects into **intergenerational horizons**. The framework emphasises resilience, trust, and collective impact, positioning governance purpose as a driver of enduring environmental and community outcomes.

Framework Key elements include:

- ⇒ **Resilience** – building structures and capacity that can withstand change and uncertainty.
- ⇒ **Trust** – embedding accountability and transparency to sustain participation.
- ⇒ **Collective Impact** – aligning diverse stakeholders under a shared purpose.
- ⇒ **Intergenerational Horizons** – encouraging groups to plan for **100-year outcomes**, while structuring shorter cycles of action (5–10 years) to keep progress visible and achievable.

Application: Catchment Groups are encouraged to use the framework to design action plans that balance long-term vision with short-term delivery. For example, groups may set 5-year water quality targets that contribute to a 50-year restoration goal, ensuring each step aligns with the overarching north star.

Governance Insight: *Lasting the Long Game* demonstrates how purpose can be both **lofty and practical**:

- ⇒ It anchors governance in community good.
- ⇒ It balances intergenerational vision with shorter horizons.
- ⇒ It shows how trust and accountability sustain collective effort over time.

Reference NZ Landcare Trust. (n.d.). *Lasting the long game*. NZ Landcare Trust. Retrieved May 16, 2026, from <https://www.landcare.org.nz>

Appendix E

Exemplar 2. Wakatū Incorporation – Te Pae Tawhiti

Wakatū Incorporation – Te Pae Tawhiti

Overview Wakatū Incorporation, based in Te Taihū (top of the South Island), represents around 4,000 owners from Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Rārua, Ngāti Koata, and Te Ātiawa. It manages land, food and beverage ventures (*Kono*), health and wellness (*Au Ora*), and cultural programmes (*Manaaki*).

Vision In 2017, Wakatū articulated *Te Pae Tawhiti*; a **500-year intergenerational vision**. Rooted in whakapapa and taonga stewardship, it deliberately transcends immediate projects and personalities, anchoring governance in enduring community good.

Framework The vision is structured around five intergenerational outcomes:

- **Papa Whenua**- protecting and growing land as taonga.
- **Taiao**- practicing kaitiakitanga to nurture land, water, and sea.
- **Whānau**- ensuring people live well, connected to history and purpose.
- **Putea**- creating value through values, sustaining legacy.
- **Ngākau Hihiko**- innovation, courage, and ambition to explore new opportunities.

Application Each Wakatū initiative must align with *Te Pae Tawhiti*. Shorter cycles of action (20-year programmes, annual reporting) keep progress visible while contributing to the 500 year horizon. This balance of lofty vision and achievable steps sustains trust and accountability.

Governance Insight *Te Pae Tawhiti* exemplifies how long-term purpose can act as a strategic north star:

- It legitimises mandate through whakapapa.
- It balances long-term vision with shorter horizons.
- It demonstrates how trust and accountability sustain participation across generations.

Reference Wakatū Incorporation. (2017). *Te Pae Tawhiti: Our 500-year vision*. Wakatū Incorporation.