

Protecting our birds: public attitudes toward predator control in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Summary

Introduction

Birds are vital indicators of environmental health and a treasured part of the biodiversity of Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa NZ). Protecting native bird populations is central to the country's Predator Free 2050 vision, which relies on collective community action to suppress and eliminate key predators. Monitoring bird populations helps measure conservation success while building public awareness and support.

The New Zealand Garden Bird Survey (NZGBS), the longest-running biodiversity citizen science initiative in the country, has gathered over 80,000 survey responses since 2007 from household gardens, schools, and parks nationwide. The NZGBS supports environmental reporting and research on biodiversity change, while also promoting well-being and environmental action among participants like conservation and landscape restoration.

Since 2021, NZGBS participants have been asked what more can be done to care for birds. Predator and weed management are the key actions most often identified. To delve deeper into pest and weed management with the public the Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (MWLR) Group of the Bioeconomy Science Institute partnered with Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa) to host a provocation. This provocation was interactive, bilingual (te reo Māori, English) and consisted of statements and a forum run within Te Papa's Te Taiao | Nature exhibition (Te Taiao exhibition). The provocation encouraged visitors to reflect on the importance of protecting birds and what felt about techniques like predator trapping to care for birds. It promoted the engagement with the NZGBS.

Methods

- The provocation: *To protect birds, everyone with a garden should have to trap and dispose of pests like rats* was co-developed by MWLR Group and Te Papa.
- The provocation ran between 28 April and 13 July 2025 as part of the Te Taiao exhibition through Te Au | The Current, a forum designed to spark public discussion on environmental challenges and encourage reflection on personal responsibility for conservation.
- Participants selected an emotional response category and could provide written comments explaining their views in response to the provocation. Basic demographic data was collected to explore how views varied. The provocation aimed to capture public perceptions of predator control, explore emotional and ethical dimensions of conservation, and inform more inclusive, community-led approaches to achieving a predator-free Aotearoa NZ.

Results

- A total of 5,217 visitors to Te Papa responded to the provocation and forum between 28 April and 13 July 2025.
 - Of these, 3,179 responses were analysed, including 1,487 written comments that provided deeper insights into participants' reasoning.
 - Just over half (54%) of the 3,179 analysed participants identified as female, with younger age groups strongly represented. Most (67%) participants were based in NZ, particularly the Wellington region, and 57% primarily lived in urban areas (towns or cities).
- Most participants supported backyard trapping to protect native birdlife.

- Hope (57%) and excitement (25%) were the dominant emotional responses, reflecting optimism, kaitiakitanga (guardianship/protection/stewardship), and national pride.
- Supporters viewed trapping as a simple, collective act that could make a tangible difference for biodiversity, motivated by care for future generations and a shared vision of a predator-free Aotearoa NZ.
- In contrast, some (smaller) groups did not support backyard trapping, expressing worry (12%), indifference (3%), or anger (3%) about it.
 - Those who were worried questioned the morality, humaneness, or practicality of killing pests, preferring non-lethal approaches led by government or conservation agencies.
 - Indifferent participants doubted the relevance or effectiveness of trapping, reflecting their disengagement from environmental issues.
 - Angry participants expressed frustration, either directed at rats as a threat or at the perceived burden of 'compulsory' trapping, and revealing concerns about responsibility, safety, and control.

Recommendations

Our results suggest public engagement with predator control can be strengthened through clear communication, practical support, and education that recognises emotional diversity and ethical complexity.

Framing predator control in the following five ways is likely to garner the greatest public support:

1 **Promote collective responsibility and shared kaitiakitanga**

- Frame predator control as a community-led effort grounded in shared guardianship rather than individual obligation.
- Emphasise collaboration through local networks and collective action.

2 **Enable practical and humane participation**

- Provide accessible resources, training, and clear guidance on humane trap use and carcass disposal, while supporting research into non-lethal alternatives.

3 **Educate and engage diverse audiences**

- Use education and storytelling to connect predator control with visible local benefits, such as the return of native birds, and to inspire intergenerational care for ecosystems.

4 **Celebrate success and foster national pride**

- Share conservation success stories that showcase community achievement and reinforce New Zealand's identity as a leader in protecting native wildlife.

5 **Acknowledge and channel emotion constructively**

- Recognise feelings of worry, frustration, or fear related to predator control.
- Guide these emotions toward positive, coordinated conservation action that strengthens trust and inclusion.

Our five recommendations reinforce that effective communication about predator control must integrate emotional awareness, ethical reflection, and practical guidance. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility, supporting humane practices, and celebrating collective achievements, future initiatives can strengthen public trust and engagement in achieving a predator-free Aotearoa NZ.

1 Introduction

Birds (manu) are good indicators for monitoring the health of the environment, as well as being a treasured part of Aotearoa New Zealand's (Aotearoa NZ's) biodiversity. Protecting and enhancing our bird populations was a key goal of the Predator Free 2050 initiative,¹ relying on a nationwide network of local partnerships and community efforts to suppress and eliminate target predators. Documenting trends in bird populations can indicate successful outcomes from predator control activities as well as motivate public support for these activities. Given the challenges professionals face to adequately monitor bird populations at the spatial and temporal scales to demonstrate impacts from interventions like predator control, engaging citizen scientists to contribute to data collection provides immense benefit to achieving monitoring and public engagement goals (MacLeod et al. 2022).

The New Zealand Garden Bird Survey (NZGBS) is the longest running biodiversity citizen science initiative in Aotearoa NZ. From its launch in 2007 (and up to 2024), over 80,000 surveys of gardens, schools and parks have been submitted by tens of thousands of New Zealanders. The NZGBS serves both scientific and policy purposes. It has built a nationwide long-term biodiversity data set to support environmental reporting. It also delivers social benefits by helping with participant well-being and supporting environmental action by participants.

2 Purpose

Since 2021, NZGBS participants have been asked what more can be done to care for birds. Predator and weed management are the key actions most often identified.

To delve deeper into pest and weed management with the public the Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (MWLR) Group of the Bioeconomy Science Institute partnered with Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand (Te Papa) to host an interactive bilingual provocation within Te Papa's Te Taiao | Nature exhibition (Te Taiao exhibition). The provocation encouraged visitors to reflect on the importance of protecting birds and what felt about techniques like predator trapping to care for birds. It also promoted the engagement with the NZGBS.

3 Methods

3.1 Data collection

Te Au | The Current

Researchers from the MWLR Group collaborated with Te Papa staff to host an interactive 'provocation' activity within the Te Taiao exhibition. This activity took place through 'Te Au | The Current',² a forum designed to spark discussion and explore new ideas to tackle some of Aotearoa NZ's environmental challenges (hereafter, 'Te Au').

¹ Predator Free 2050 was disestablished 14 August 2025. See more about the original initiative here: <https://pf2050.co.nz/>

² For more on this forum see: <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/current-accessible-version>

Each provocation presented a short fact about the issue, a suggested solution or approach, a prompt question (for example, 'How do you feel about this idea?'), multiple response options, and a visual element to engage participants.

Participants could take part either in person at Te Papa or on the Te Au web page. They were invited to answer the question, provide basic demographic details (such as country, region, age range, and gender), and consent to sharing their responses under a Creative Commons 'zero licence' (see <https://creativecommons.org/public-domain/cc0/>). An optional open-ended question allowed participants to elaborate on their views, with all responses displayed bilingually, in English and te reo Māori.

3.2 Methods

An iterative approach was taken to developing and finalising the provocation activity's fact, idea, question, and responses. Our goal was to highlight the link between bird protection and pest trapping, while encouraging the public to reflect on how they could contribute to protecting birds in their own backyards. An initial hui between MWLR Group researchers and the exhibition experience developer from Te Papa's Experience, Design and Content team clarified the research aims, namely, to encourage visitors to the Te Taiao exhibition to engage with, and reflect on, the importance of protecting birds.

After outlining the importance of predator control in urban environments for protecting birdlife to the exhibition experience developer, online brainstorming sessions were held with Te Papa staff (including a New Zealand ornithologist) and MWLR Group researchers. These discussions explored questions such as:

- How can we understand what actions people believe they should take to protect birds and control pests?
- How might we provide visitors with enough context to prepare them for the prompt/provocation?

Several ideas began to emerge, including exploring whether people are willing to take action, what motivates or discourages them, and how best to frame bird protection as a shared responsibility.

Following several online meetings, the fact, idea, question, and responses were finalised in English and then interpreted and encapsulated in reo Māori. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the final fact, idea, questions, response options, and image used in the bird provocation. Figures 2 and 3 show what the Te Papa displays in the Te Taiao exhibition looked like for the public.

Table 1. The fact, idea, question, response options, and image used in the bird provocation in the Te Taiao exhibition at Te Papa on bird protection and pest control

	English	Te Reo Māori
Topic category	Birds	Ngā manu
Fact/problem meka/raru	Native birds lose about 26.6 million eggs and chicks to rats, stoats, and possums every year. (source Stats NZ)	Tōna 26.6 miriona ngā hua, me ngā pīpī, a ngā manu taketake ka riro i ngā kiore, ngā tori, me ngā paihamu ia tau. (Tatauranga Aotearoa)
Idea / ngā huatau	To protect birds, everyone with a garden should have to trap and dispose of pests like rats.	Hei tiaki i ngā manu, me whai wāhi te katoa o te hunga whai māra ki te hopu me te porowhiu i ngā kīrehe pērā i ngā kiore.
Question/pātai	How do you feel about this idea?	He pēhea ki a koe tēnei take?
Answer options / ngā whiringa whakautu	Excited, hopeful, don't care, worried, angry	Tino koa, koingo, aua atu, anipā, riri
Open-ended question	Tell us why?	He pēhea ki a koe tēnei take?
Demographic questions & consent / taupori whakaae-ā-tuhi	First name (optional), gender, age range, country, regions of NZ, and residence in NZ	Ingoa (kōwhiri), ira, tau, tauwhenua, rohe o Aotearoa, me kāinga ki Aotearoa

Ethics approval for the research was granted by the MWLR Ethics Committee (SE: 2425/32).³ A data-sharing agreement was established between MWLR and Te Papa, as the exhibition involved collecting public opinions.⁴ The provocation ran for just over two months, from 28 April to 13 July 2025, coinciding with the NZGBS period (28 June to 6 July 2025). To encourage participation in the NZGBS, information and promotional material were also featured on the web page for Te Au.

³ No potential risks to the Te Papa visitors were identified as the project used conventional data analysis methods on a non-controversial topic. Participants under 18 were asked to confirm that they had parent or guardian approval before participating in the research.

⁴ Upon completion of the exhibition, Te Papa was committed to removing any identifiable information from the collected data before lodging it with data.govt.nz under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence. For the purposes of our research, Te Papa granted MWLR exclusive access to the anonymised dataset for three months following the exhibition's conclusion, prior to its public release.



Figure 1. The image accompanying the text for the provocation in the Te Taiao exhibition at Te Papa showing a ship rat attacking juvenile fantail. (Source: Ngā Manu Trust. Photo credit: David Mudge.)

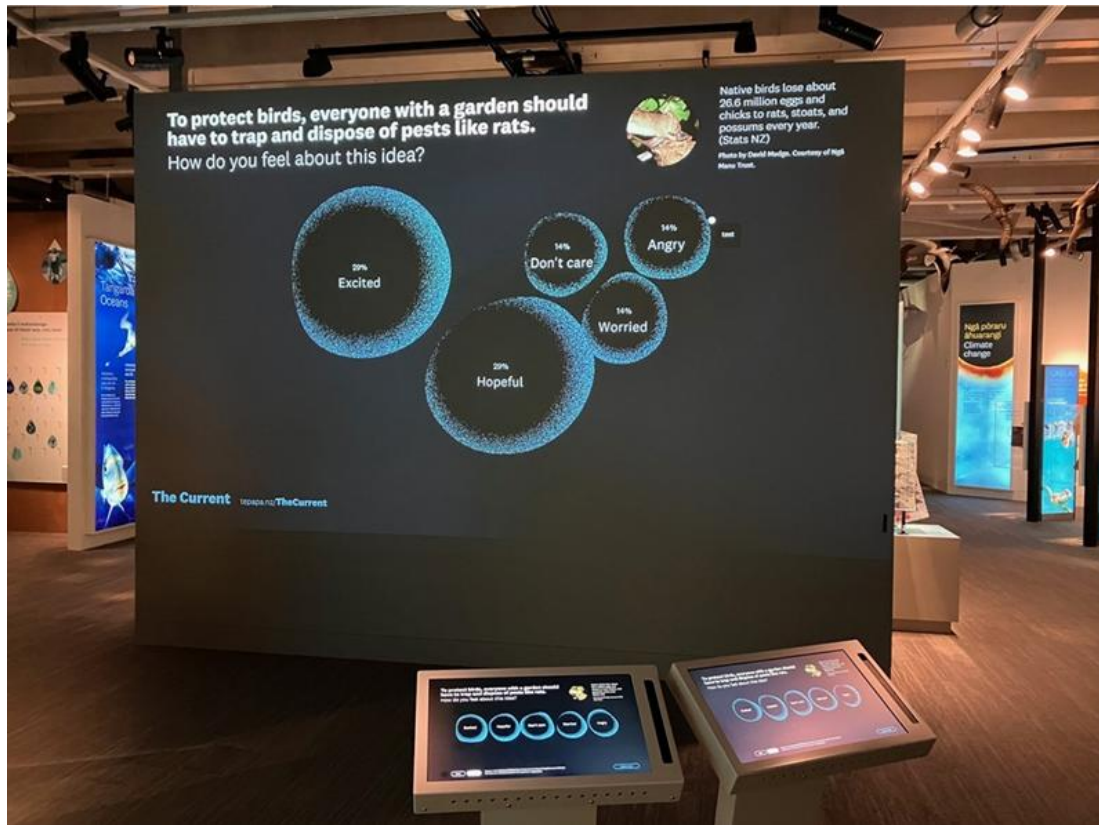


Figure 2. An image of the live results of the provocation displayed for the visitors in the Te Taiao exhibition at Te Papa – viewed in English. (Source: Photo taken by Murphy Peoples.)

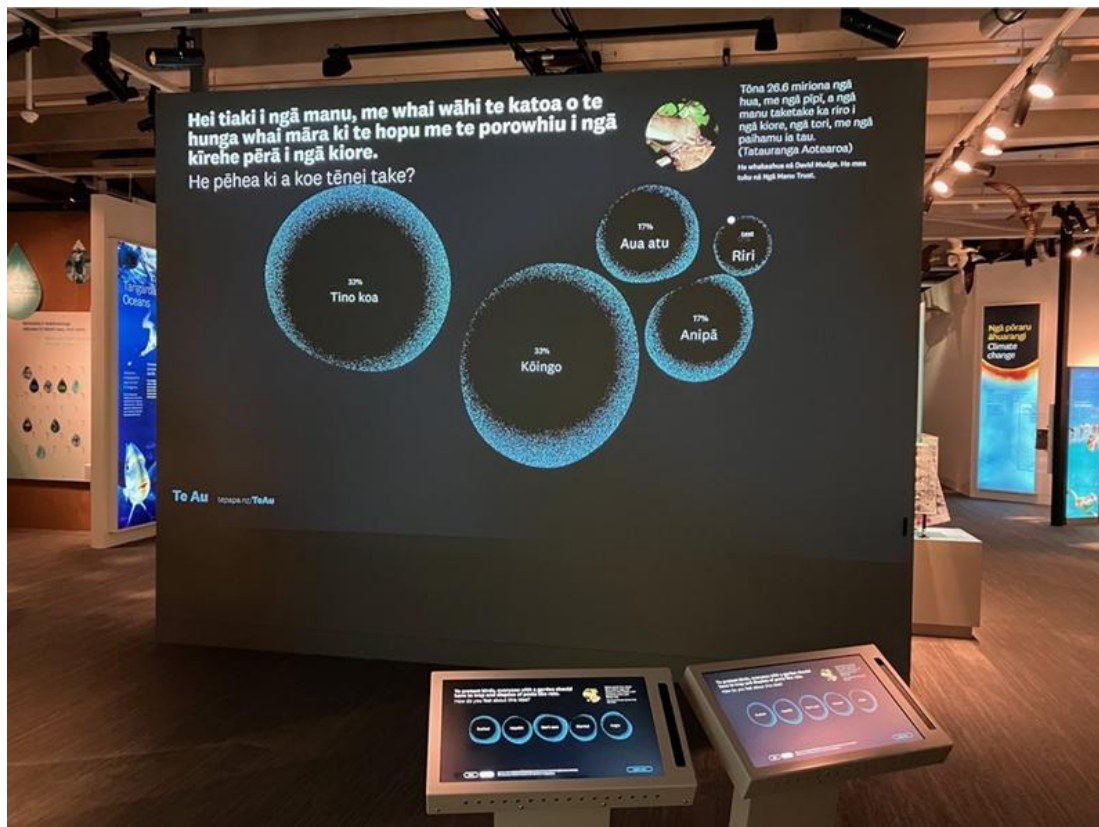


Figure 3. An image of the live results of the provocation displayed for the visitors in the Te Taiao exhibition at Te Papa – viewed in te reo Māori. (Source: Photo taken by Murphy Peoples.)

3.3 Data analysis

In August 2025, Te Papa provided the BSI-MWLR group with the data set in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with all participant identifiers masked to protect anonymity. Over the 11-week period (28 April–13 July 2025), a total of 5,217 visitors, including both in-person and online participants, took part in the provocation. Of these, 3,179 responses were analysed after excluding incomplete or irrelevant entries, and 1,487 participants provided written comments explaining their emotional responses.

Comments written in te reo Māori ($n = 16$) were extracted and translated by Tīma Tuhituhi at Te Papa. An additional 26 comments that included a mix of te reo Māori and English (i.e. with common Māori words/kupu reo interspersed) were also translated to provide full context and ensure meaning was retained.

Participants were asked to select one of five emotional response categories ('excited', 'hopeful', 'don't care', 'worried' or 'angry'), and then describe why this feeling connected them most strongly to protecting birds from predator pests via trapping. This open-ended question invited participants to elaborate on their emotional reasoning.

All qualitative responses were thematically analysed to explore how participants expressed their feelings toward predator control via trapping. The coding and data analysis were conducted by the first author. Responses were coded in Excel, with entries containing no comment, unclear wording, inappropriate language, or irrelevant symbols/numbers excluded from the data set.

Demographic data supplied by participants were also collated and summarised. Statistical analyses and graphs were generated in Excel to give visual representations of key trends across gender, age range, location, and emotional response categories.

4 Results

4.1 Demographics

This section summarises the demographic profile of the 3,179 participants analysed (Figure 4). The accompanying graphs provide an overview of participant characteristics and locations.

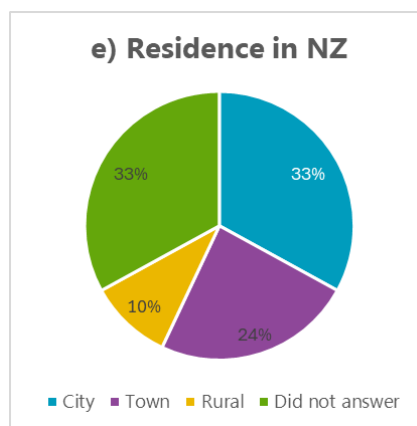
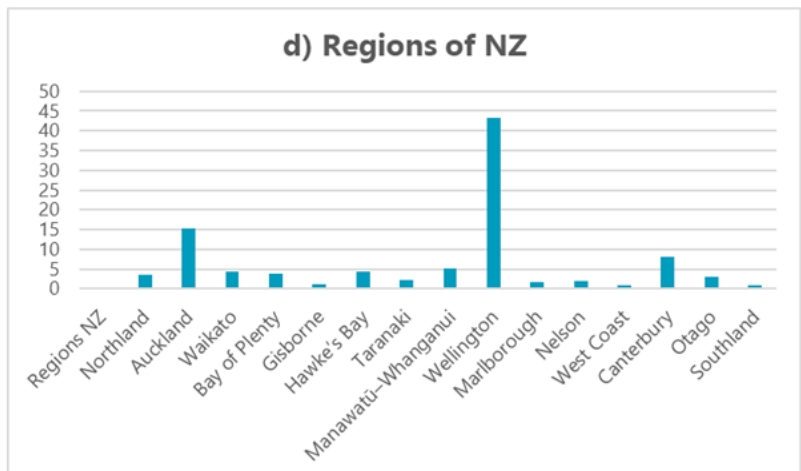
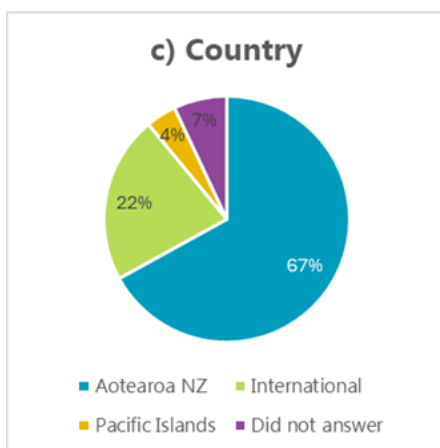
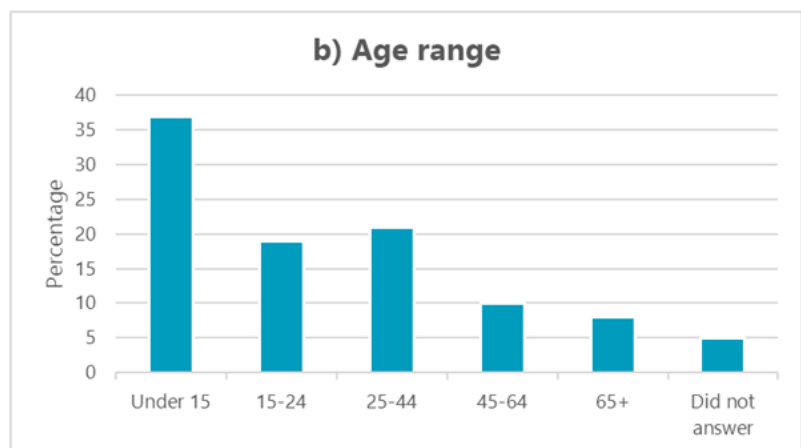
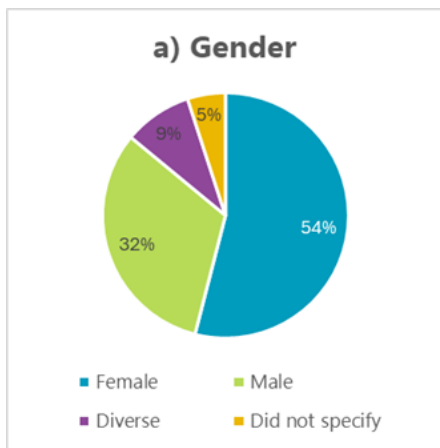


Figure 4. Percentage of responses to the provocation. Results broken down by: a) gender b), age range, c) country, d) regions of NZ, e) residence (type of area) in NZ.

Figure 4a presents the gender distribution, showing that just over half identified as female. Figure 4b illustrates the age profile, showing strong representation from younger age groups. Figure 4c shows participants' countries of origin, with the majority based in NZ. Figure 4d details the regional distribution within NZ, with participants from the Wellington region being the largest cohort. Finally, Figure 4e shows participant's types of residence, indicating that over half (57%) lived in urban areas (towns and cities).

4.2 Emotional responses towards predator control

This section provides a detailed analysis of the five emotional response categories, summarising the key themes and patterns based on participant comments. A reminder that the participants were asked to expand on their emotional responses based on this provocation: *To protect birds, everyone with a garden should have to trap and dispose of pests like rats.*

The 'hopeful' and 'excited' categories received the highest number of overall responses, followed by 'worried', 'don't care' and 'angry'. The 'hopeful' category also had the highest proportion of analysable responses, while only a small proportion of 'don't care' responses were suitable for analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of the total number and percentage of responses by category, including total number of responses, non-responses and responses analysed

Category	Total no. of responses (%)	Responses to open-ended questions analysed (%)
Hopeful (kōinga)	1,791 (57%)	808 (45%)
Excited (tino koa)	787 (25%)	562 (72%)
Worried (anipā)	404 (12%)	247 (61%)
Don't care (aua atu)	100 (3%)	28 (28%)
Angry (hiri)	97 (3%)	47 (48%)

4.3 Hopeful (kōinga)

Over half of all participants (57%) expressed hope, framing predator control as a pathway to safeguarding NZ's unique manu (birds) and ensuring their survival for future generations. Hopefulness was often grounded in intergenerational responsibility, with many highlighting the importance of leaving behind healthy ecosystems for mokopuna (grandchildren). A strong theme of collective responsibility emerged, with participants emphasising that even small, localised actions, such as backyard trapping, could contribute to large-scale environmental change if undertaken widely.

Hope was also tied to visions of ecological balance and restored connections with nature, including kinship with non-human entities and the healing of damaged landscapes. For many, the prospect of a predator-free Aotearoa NZ symbolised not just environmental recovery, but also national pride and optimism that through shared effort, the nation could create a future where native birds thrive once again.

Table 3 summarises the five key themes, explanation, and representative quotes associated with hopeful (kōinga) responses.

Table 3. Breakdown of themes, theme definitions, and representative quotes for ‘hopeful’ (kōinga) responses

Theme	Explanation	Quotes
Protecting taonga and native birds	Emphasise the intrinsic value of manu (birds) as taonga (treasures), unique to Aotearoa, and worthy of protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I do not want to lose all the beautiful native birds in New Zealand.’ (under 15, female, international) • “Te rā pea ka mate ngā kararehe o Aotearoa. The animal of Aotearoa may die/go extinct.’ (under 15, female, Manawatu-Wanganui, town)
Future generations and intergenerational responsibility	Hope framed in relation to ensuring birds and ecosystems survive for future generations and the long-term well-being of Papatūānuku (Earth mother).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘This will help sustain our current bird population for future generations... there will be hope for my mokopuna.’ (45-64, female, Waikato, city) • ‘We need to protect our bird life for future generations.’ (25-44, male, Marlborough, town) • ‘Ki aku nei whakaaro - ākuanei ka mate tātou ki te huri whakaaro ki te taiao. I ēnei wā he kōwhiringa te tē aro – engari kāore e pērā hei anamata. Ko te manako ia ka oho ake tātou ki tēnei meka.’ ‘In my opinion, soon we will all need to turn our thoughts to nature. These days ignorance is a choice – but the future won’t allow that. I hope we all wake up to this fact.’ (25-44, male, Wellington, town)
Collective action and small actions towards big change	A hopeful belief that meaningful environmental progress is possible when everyone takes responsibility and contributes through small, local actions that together create a powerful collective impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Working together we can achieve great things.’ (15, male, Bay of Plenty, town) • ‘If everyone had a backyard trap, we could all do our part and make a significant difference.’ (25-44, female, Taranaki, city) • ‘Sustained small scale initiatives like this would help safeguard biodiversity. Every effort counts!’ (15-24, female, international)
Restoring balance and connection with nature	A vision of rebalancing ecosystems, deepening kinship with nonhuman relations, and healing damaged environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Whakawhanaungatanga (process of establishing relationships) is the deepening of connection... with our non-human whanaunga (relatives) too like our forests, and our manu (birds).’ (25-44, diverse, Waikato, rural) • ‘Returning the land back to naturalised state is possible and the best option.’ (45-64, male, international) • ‘Regional pest management... part of the answer but not the full solution.’ (15-24, male, Otago, city)
A better future for Aotearoa New Zealand	Envisioning a predator-free NZ where birds and people thrive together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘So, we can protect the beautiful birds, and the remaining native forest Aotearoa possesses.’ (under 15, female, Wellington, town) • ‘If everyone had a trap, we’d reach predator free that much sooner.’ (45-64, diverse, Canterbury, city) • ‘One day all the pests will be gone, and our birds can fly free like they once could.’ (under 15, female, Wellington, city)

4.4 Excited (Tino koa)

A quarter of all participants (25%) expressed excitement, describing predator control as an inspiring opportunity to make a tangible difference for manu (bird) populations and biodiversity in Aotearoa NZ. Their excitement was linked to enthusiasm for hands-on action, with trapping framed as both a practical and empowering way to protect native species. Many associated predator control with the possibility of seeing more birds return to their backyards, parks, and everyday lives. Excitement was also tied to feelings of national pride, with some participants envisioning Aotearoa NZ as a global leader in conservation. These participants tended to focus on the positive outcomes of trapping, celebrating the chance to contribute to ecological recovery and to experience the joy of native birds flourishing in urban environments.

Table 4 summarises the four key themes, explanations, and representative quotes associated with ‘excited’ (tino koa) responses.

Table 4. Breakdown of themes, theme definitions, and representative quotes for ‘excited’ (tino koa) responses

Theme	Explanation	Quotes
Protection of native birds	Excitement is linked to trapping which is seen as a practical way to protect taonga species (e.g., kiwi, kākāpō, tūī). Participant’s quotes showed they valued birdlife and pest control was linked directly to birds’ survival and flourishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘We need to save our kiwi and kākāpō before it’s too late.’ (25-44, female, Wellington, rural) • ‘I want more birds in my backyard for their beautiful song and to help balance the environment!’ (65+, female, Otago, city) • ‘I used to never see tūī at all when I was a kid but now, I see heaps of them flying around out garden! So amazing!’ (65+, female, Wellington, city)
Personal and localised experiences	Excitement was reinforced by personal observations. Participants mentioned seeing or hearing more birds in their gardens and communities after engaging in trapping, which validated the benefits of action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Since we started trapping, I’ve noticed more tūī singing around my house.’ (65+, female, Wellington, city) • ‘Every garden should have access to free traps.’ (25-44, female, Manawatu-Wanganui, city) • ‘Bird life in my area has improved dramatically since our Predator Free programme has been working.’ (65+, female, Wellington, city)
Kaitiakitanga, collective responsibility, and national pride	Trapping seen as shared kaitiakitanga and civic duty to protect nature for future generations. Linked to Predator Free 2050 and national pride in Aotearoa NZ’s leadership as a bird-rich nation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Trapping is something small we can all do to protect our taiao for the next generation.’ (25-44, female, Wellington, town) • ‘Kaitiakitanga, (stewardship) lets uphold our responsibility to te taiao (the environment).’ (25-44, diverse, Waikato, rural) • ‘This is part of Predator Free 2050 – we can do this together.’ (15-24, female, Auckland, city) • ‘I feel proud knowing New Zealand is working hard to save our birds.’ (25-44, female, Northland, city)
Negative attitudes toward pests	Excitement often stemmed from strong dislike of introduced. Participants described these animals as ‘destructive’, ‘invasive’, and a ‘threat’ that needed to be removed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Possums and stoats are destroying our native wildlife – they have to go.’ (under 15, female, Taranaki, city) • ‘Patua ngā kiore katoa – exterminate all of the rats.’ (under 15, male, Wellington, city)

4.5 Worried (anipā)

Around one in eight participants (12%) expressed worry about predator control, reflecting feelings of uncertainty, tension, and moral concern. Some participants questioned the ethics and humaneness of killing animals, expressing discomfort with the idea of taking life, even for conservation. Others voiced concern about unintended ecological consequences, such as disrupting ‘natural systems’ or creating new imbalances. Worry also stemmed from distrust in large-scale interventions, with participants emphasising that responsibility for predator management should be shared more evenly between individuals, communities, and government. For some of these participants, predator control elicited moral and emotional tensions, representing both a desire to protect native birds and unease about the means required to do so.

Table 5 summarises the seven key themes, explanations, and representative quotes associated with ‘worried’ (anipā) responses.

Table 5. Breakdown of themes, theme definitions, and representative quotes for ‘worried’ (anipā) responses

Theme	Explanation	Quotes
Threat to native birds / extinction concern	Participants worried that native bird species (tūī, kiwi) are or will be driven to extinction if pests are not controlled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Because soon birds will be extinct.’ (under 15, male, Auckland, rural) • ‘The native birds will soon be all gone.’ (under 15, female, Wellington, town)
Ethical and emotional discomfort with killing pests	Participants raised moral and emotional discomfort with killing animals; preferring humane, non-lethal methods and expressed sadness or fear at harming or handling animals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘I don’t want to kill any animals. Even though I want the birds to thrive.’ (15, female, Hawkes Bay, rural) • ‘Is this the most humane solution?’ (25-44, male, international) • ‘Having to get rid of the rats yourself is really gross and scary.’ (15-24, female, Canterbury, city)
Collateral harm / risk to pets and non-target wildlife	Participants raised anxiety that traps/poisons will injure or kill pets, native birds, or other non-target animals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Other household pets could be injured through the traps.’ (under 15, Canterbury, town) • ‘What if your pet accidentally gets stuck in the trap?’ (under 15, female, Wellington, city)
Practical/logistical concerns (disposal, who collects, workload)	Participants raised questions about how traps will work in practice: who disposes of carcasses, who enforces participation, and the workload for individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Having to dispose of the dead pests themselves could be upsetting.’ (under 15, diverse, Wellington, town) • ‘Who will collect the pests? What will happen to them?’ (45-64, female, Canterbury, rural)
Concern about scale/feasibility	Participants raised doubts that individual backyard trapping will meaningfully address the pest problem or that there are too many pests to control this way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘There’s too many pests to get rid of them all.’ (15-24, female, international) • ‘This would require community collaboration which is both hopeful and worrying.’ (15-24, male, Auckland, city)
Preference for well-organised collective solutions (not individual-only)	Participants viewed that pest control should be organised at community, regional, or national scales rather than left to individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Systemic problems should have systemic solutions – not place the onus on the individual.’ (15-24, female, Waikato, city) • ‘This should be a collective action.’ (25-44, female, Wellington, city)
Pro-control voices	Participants explicitly supported strong control measures, including drastic methods, viewing eradication as necessary despite discomfort.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Absolutely there should be traps in EVERY backyard... with a will we could restore the balance.’ (65+, male, Wellington, town) • ‘We need drastic measures to save the birds.’ (45-64, female, Otago, town)

4.6 Don't care (aua atu)

A small proportion (3%) of participants expressed indifference toward predator control, often minimising the problem or questioning its relevance to their lives. These participants tended to view trapping as unnecessary, inconvenient, or outside of their personal responsibility. Some reflected a disengagement from environmental concerns more generally, while others appeared unconvinced that predator control would meaningfully impact bird survival. This indifference occasionally stemmed from a sense of futility, with suggestions that individual efforts would not be enough to make a difference.

Table 6 summarises the six key themes, explanation, and representative quotes associated with 'don't care' (aua atu) responses.

Table 6. Breakdown of themes, explanations, and representative quotes for 'don't care' (aua atu) responses

Theme	Explanation	Quotes
Apathy and disengagement	Participants were indifferent, saying pest control was not their concern or too much work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'It's not my problem.' (under 15, did not specify, international) • 'I'm not too affected by this.' (25-44, female, Canterbury, city)
Practical and personal barriers	Participants felt predator control didn't apply to them due to lifestyle or circumstances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I don't have a garden.' (15-24, female, Northland, rural)
Neutrality and scepticism	Participants saw little impact from the proposal or doubting people would follow through.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I used to have traps at my home. The idea isn't bad but I don't think many people would listen to this rule so it wouldn't change much.' (15-24, female, Wellington, city) • 'I think... it would make little overall difference.' (15-24, diverse, Wellington, town) • 'Kaore e ngā tāngata i te mahia tēnei whakaaro. People don't think this way.' (15-24, female, Bay of Plenty, rural)
Philosophical or ethical beliefs about nature	Participants resisted trapping on ethical or philosophical grounds, preferring to let nature run its course and valuing all species.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'I don't like to disturb the eco-cycle balance.' (25-44, female, Canterbury, city) • 'Nature operates in its own unique way; everything happens for a reason to maintain balance.' (15-24, male, Wellington, city) • 'Shouldn't value one species over another.' (15-24, male, Wellington, city)
Delegation of responsibility / individual choice	Participants felt trapping should be a personal decision, not a collective requirement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'It's up to the owner of the garden.' (15-24, male, Pacific Islands)
General positive sentiment toward nature (non-committal)	Participants expressed appreciation for nature in general, without addressing trapping directly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Nature is good.' (under 15, female, Wellington, town) • 'I love to be in nature.' (under 15, male, Manawatu-Wanganui, city)

4.7 Angry (riri)

A small proportion (3%) of participants expressed anger, revealing strong emotional reactions toward both the presence of rats and the idea of compulsory trapping. For many, anger was directed primarily at rats, which were described with hostility, fear, or disgust and often framed as a direct threat to people, pets, and native birds. This emotion was closely tied to a protective instinct, reflecting a desire to defend what participants valued, particularly native birdlife, but also their families and home environments. While some responses included reasoned arguments about ecological responsibility and balance, many were dominated by raw expressions of frustration, hostility, or despair. Overall, anger reflected a complex mix of personal and collective concern, positioning rats as both a symbol of threat and a source of ongoing tension in urban environments.

Table 7 summarises the five key themes, explanations, and representative quotes associated with ‘angry’ (riri) responses.

Table 7. Breakdown of themes, theme definitions, and representative quotes for ‘angry’ (riri) responses

Theme	Explanation	Quotes
Negative experiences and desire to protect people, pets, and property	Participants expressed frustration and fear toward rats, driven by damage, nuisance, and safety concerns for households, animals, and health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘I hate rats, they get into my house.’ (under 15, male, international) ‘Rats ruined my vege garden.’ (65+, female, West Coast, town) ‘Rats bite my chickens.’ (25-44, male, Wellington, rural)
Animal rights / pro-rat/ anti-killing	Participants argue that all animals deserve respect and a right to live; oppose killing or extermination of rats and other pests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘Rats don't deserve to die even if people don't like them.’ (under 15, diverse, Wellington, city) ‘Pests who were introduced should be exterminated as humanely possible.’ (25-44, female, international)
Species-equivalence / oppose ‘birds vs rats’ framing	Participants reject prioritising one species over another; argue for balance or that one species shouldn't be sacrificed for another.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘We shouldn't kill one species just to save another.’ (15, female, Wellington, rural) ‘What gives humans the right to control nature.’ (45-66, female, Wellington, city) ‘I think that destroying a species to save another is not the answer and only causes more ecological harm. It is like putting a plaster on an open wound.’ (15-24, female, Auckland, city)
Human culpability / systems blame	Participants place responsibility on humans for introduced pests and argue humans should fix it or change behaviour/policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘We introduce them... this is our responsibility.’ (25-44, female, international) ‘Humans are the biggest pest. deal with them first.’ (15-24, female, Auckland, town)
Policy / resource / equity arguments	Participants call for public investment, policy change, or questioning resource allocation (e.g., more tax for taiao (environmental) protection).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘More taxpayer money should be invested into our taiao to protect the beauty of Aotearoa. Instead of tax cuts for the rich.’ (25-44, female, Auckland, city)

5 Conclusions

Participants expressed a wide spectrum of emotions toward predator control, ranging from enthusiasm and optimism to frustration, concern, and indifference. Together, these emotional perspectives reveal the depth of public engagement with conservation in Aotearoa NZ, as well as the tensions surrounding how best to protect native birdlife.

Hopeful/kōinga participants emphasised shared responsibility and long-term care for the environment. Their optimism was grounded in intergenerational stewardship, protecting ecosystems for mokopuna (grandchildren/future generations), and in the belief that small, local efforts could collectively contribute to large-scale environmental recovery. Hope was often intertwined with visions of ecological balance, cultural connection, and a renewed relationship between people and nature.

Those who felt excited/tino koa viewed predator control as a powerful and inspiring opportunity to make a tangible difference. Their comments reflected enthusiasm for hands-on action, national pride, and the joy of seeing manu return to everyday spaces. For these participants, trapping symbolised empowerment, collective achievement, and the possibility of ecological renewal.

The worried/anipā responses revealed discomfort with the moral and ethical dimensions of predator control. Many questioned the fairness of killing animals introduced by humans, expressing empathy for pests and frustration with perceived hypocrisy in human–animal relationships. This unease often stemmed from mistrust in institutional or societal approaches, and a preference for non-lethal or systemic solutions.

Indifferent/aua atu participants expressed detachment or scepticism toward predator control. For some, the issue felt distant or irrelevant to their daily lives; for others, apathy stemmed from doubts about the effectiveness of individual actions. This group highlighted a gap between conservation messaging and personal engagement, underscoring the challenge of sustaining public motivation.

Finally, angry/riri participants voiced strong hostility toward pests (especially rats) and frustration at their impacts on both native wildlife and human wellbeing. Their anger reflected fear, disgust, and a desire for safety, both ecological and domestic. While some framed their views through ecological reasoning, others responded more viscerally, viewing rats as threats spreading contamination.

6 Recommendations

Findings from the provocation, *'To protect birds, everyone with a garden should have to trap and dispose of pests like rats,'* suggest that public engagement with predator control can be strengthened through clear communication, practical support, and education that acknowledges emotional and ethical complexity.

The report's authors recommend framing predator control in the following five ways, as this is likely to generate the greatest public support:

1 **Promote collective responsibility and shared kaitiakitanga**

Predator control should be framed as a shared, community-led effort rather than an individual obligation. Emphasising cooperation through local groups, councils, schools, and Predator Free networks can strengthen social connection, shared purpose, and collective care for nature. This approach aligns with values of kaitiakitanga, guardianship and intergenerational responsibility, helping people see trapping as part of wider pro-environmental actions.

2 **Enable practical and humane participation**

To sustain participation, people need access to practical support, including affordable traps, clear disposal systems, and safety guidance. Initiatives that make trapping simple, safe, and humane can reduce barriers and increase confidence. Providing training, demonstrations, and community-based resources can help participants act responsibly and feel supported in their contribution.

3 **Educate and engage diverse audiences**

Public education should make predator control relevant and accessible to all. Linking trapping to visible, local outcomes, such as increased sightings of native birds, can motivate participation and demonstrate tangible benefits. Highlighting how data from initiatives like the New Zealand Garden Bird Survey (NZGBS) provide scientific evidence of predator control success strengthens public understanding of its long-term value for biodiversity, ecosystem balance, and the wellbeing of future generations.

4 **Celebrate success and foster national pride**

Showcasing conservation success stories, such as Zealandia Wildlife Sanctuary (Te Māra a Tāne), Predator Free Wellington, and NZGBS bird trends, can inspire collective achievement and pride in protecting Aotearoa New Zealand's unique wildlife. Communicating the connection between individual backyard actions and large-scale environmental recovery reinforces the message that local efforts contribute to national progress, strengthening both community motivation and the country's reputation as a global leader in conservation.

5 **Acknowledge and channel emotion constructively**

Predator control evokes strong feelings: hope, pride, discomfort, and frustration. Communication strategies should recognise these emotions and guide them toward constructive conservation action. Acknowledging ethical concerns, validating fear or resistance, and providing safe, community-based ways to engage can build trust and prevent disengagement. For those uncomfortable with killing animals, initiatives like the NZGBS offer an inclusive and empowering way to contribute to bird conservation, allowing people to support biodiversity monitoring and protection through observation rather than trapping (Diprose et al. 2022; MacLeod & Diprose 2019).

Overall, support for trapping is driven by collective responsibility, hope, and national pride, while resistance arises from ethical discomfort, practical barriers, or disengagement from environmental issues. These perspectives show that predator control is not only an ecological challenge but also

a deeply social, emotional, and cultural one. By integrating empathy with evidence, and combining shared purpose with practical support, future initiatives can strengthen public trust and participation, advancing the vision of a predator-free Aotearoa NZ.

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