



Tī Kōuka

2026 update report





Tī Kōuka

THE SUSTAINABILITY
STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Hāpaitia te ara tika, pūmau ai te
rangatiratanga mō ngā uri whakatipu.

Foster the pathway of knowledge to
strength, independence and growth for
future generations.

Introduction

This is the annual update on progress towards the sustainable future that is described in Tī Kōuka: The Sustainability Strategic Framework. It is not intended to be a comprehensive description of everything that is happening across the University, but rather capturing an overview.

This year we have set the reporting timeline to coincide with Matariki, as this is a natural time of year for us to reflect on progress and challenges, preparing for the year ahead.

Contents

Tī Kōuka: The Sustainability Strategic Framework	4
Ka hau te tī: Regional and global impact	6
Te puaka tī, he tohu raumati: Education for sustainability	9
E kore e riro, he tī tāmore: Research for sustainability	16
He oraka kai te rua tī: Sustainable operations	19



Tī Kōuka

THE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Te puaka tī, he tohu raumati

Education for sustainability: The flowering of the tī kōuka in spring is said to foretell the type of weather in the summer to follow.

This alludes to the importance of equipping our students and staff with the skills, understandings and values required to be more sustainable in their lives and work. It is how they act which will determine the sustainability of our long-term future.



E kore e riro, he tī tāmore

Research for sustainability: The tī tree is firmly rooted in the ground and will not be carried away.



This characteristic relates to the importance of understanding that knowledge is handed down through the generations and the role research needs to play in our transition to a more sustainable future.

He oraka kai te rua tī

Sustainable operations: There is wellbeing in the tī pit.

It took many hands and a great deal of skill to maintain fully stocked storage pits with food from the tī tree. While a full pit signified a tribe's ability to sustain themselves and others through lean times, it also demonstrated their commitment as guardians of the environment in which they lived. Similarly, our operations and service areas must have the commitment and skills to lead in sustainable practice.



Ka hau te tī

Regional and global impact: The tī is renowned.



Hau has many meanings. The initial meaning is to be famous or well known. This links tī kōuka to the other cabbage trees around the world. Another meaning of hau is 'wind', upon which the seeds of the tī kōuka dispersed around the world on the wind. Another translation is 'vitality'. The tī kōuka is all of these things.

Whāia te ara tī

Leadership and governance for sustainability: Follow the path of the tī kōuka.

Tī kōuka were used as trail markers between settlements and through hazardous terrain especially in the south. The path to a more sustainable future is complex and challenging, but shared knowledge, values and aspirations can guide us. Strong leadership and committed governance are essential if we are to make significant progress.



Te tī e wana ake

Regenerative approach: The tī sprouts.



There is a saying, 'Ehara i te tī e wana ake', which relates to the death of tī kōuka not being final, as it will sprout again and continue to live. To succeed in our sustainability transition, we need to aspire to more than simply causing less harm. We need to take a whole system regenerative approach.

Te tī ka rito

Innovation: The tī throws up shoots.

This alludes to the new life that comes from the old. It is connected to innovation and links to the adaptability of tī kōuka being able to survive in many different habitats and environmental challenges.





Ka hau te tī
Regional and global impact

QS Sustainability Ranking 2026



While finding a benchmarking methodology that adequately recognises regional and institutional characteristics can be a challenge, reference to international sustainability rankings is emerging as the most common way to undertake comparisons.

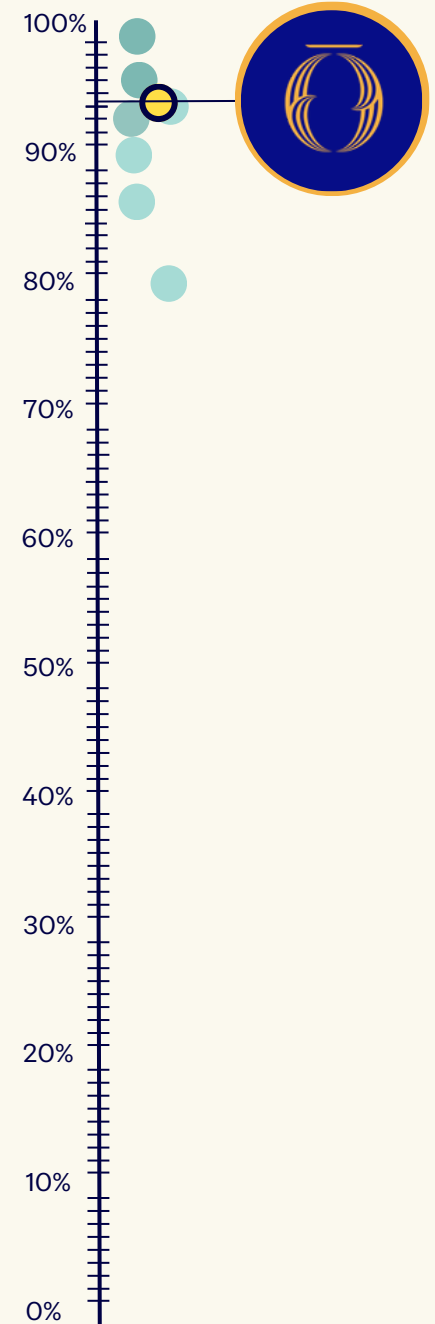
We have also taken part in more specific benchmarking such as the Sustainable Restaurant Association “Food Made Good” rating tool for all of our food services, and joining the “Climate Action Barometer” in relation to international education practice.

The 2026 QS Rankings now features over 2000 universities (18% more than 2025), and aim to measure an institution's ability to tackle the world's most wicked environmental, governance, and social challenges. . The categories that are measured are Social Impact (45% weighting), Environmental Impact (45% weighting), and Governance (10% weighting). Each category being further subdivided into a range of Performance Lenses.

As indicated by the dots in the diagram to the right, 6 of 8 Universities in Aotearoa have held positions in the top 10% for the QS Sustainability Ranking and as a group the scores have converged. Collectively New Zealand Universities have a higher average score than any other country in the global ranking. Despite improving our score (+0.7 points) we slipped to the third highest ranked university in Aotearoa, sitting at 110th place globally, which is a move to just outside of our target of top 5% (5.4%).

[Link to QS sustainability ranking methodology.](#)

QS Sustainability Rating (Global)



Q.S. Unpacked

The overall QS Sustainability ranking is determined by performance in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) categories.

The table below indicates our relative performance in each category at a national and global level. This ranking indicates significant strength in Governance.

QS Sustainability rankings also contribute to our overall global ranking status. In the Global Ranking up to 5% of the points available can come from the sustainability ranking. As a high performer in the sustainability ranking this outcome contributes significantly to our overall Top-200 Global Ranking.

Category	Global Rank 2025	Global Rank 2026	Aotearoa Rank 2026
Overall	Joint 78 th	Joint 110 th	3rd
Social Impact	98 th	95 th	2nd
Environmental Impact	96 th	Joint 152 nd	5th
Governance	39 th	Joint 50 th	1st



Te puaka tī, he tohu raumati

Education for sustainability



Learning about the SDGs

Given the high level of flexibility in Otago programmes, embedding sustainability across all study pathways must be approached in many different ways which include: creating papers about sustainability and integrating sustainability into papers to differing extents.

In a survey of all undergraduate Paper Co-ordinators in 2025, 86% of papers contributed to one or more SDGs (N=554 responses), 52% of all papers were identified as having one or more SDG as a significant and assessed part of the learning. Another 33% either had a component or an introduction relating to one or more SDGs. This pattern is consistent across all 4 divisions of the University ($\pm 6\%$).

Students enrolling in papers that related to an SDG can be seen as a proxy to our contribution through education for sustainability to achieving the SDGs. In the years 2023-2025 there was a total of 418,482 paper enrolments matched to individual SDGs, 136,951 of which were in papers with significant and assessed sustainability aspects. It is worth noting that one student enrolling in a given paper can align to several SDGs, and therefore captures the multiple contributions for each paper enrolment.

Since 2023, the number of SDG enrolments has increased by 6% (2025). These enrolments contributed to our graduates' capability to deliver on all 17 goals, with more emphasis on SDG 3 (13%), 4 (11%), 10 (11%), 5 (8%), and 16 (8%).

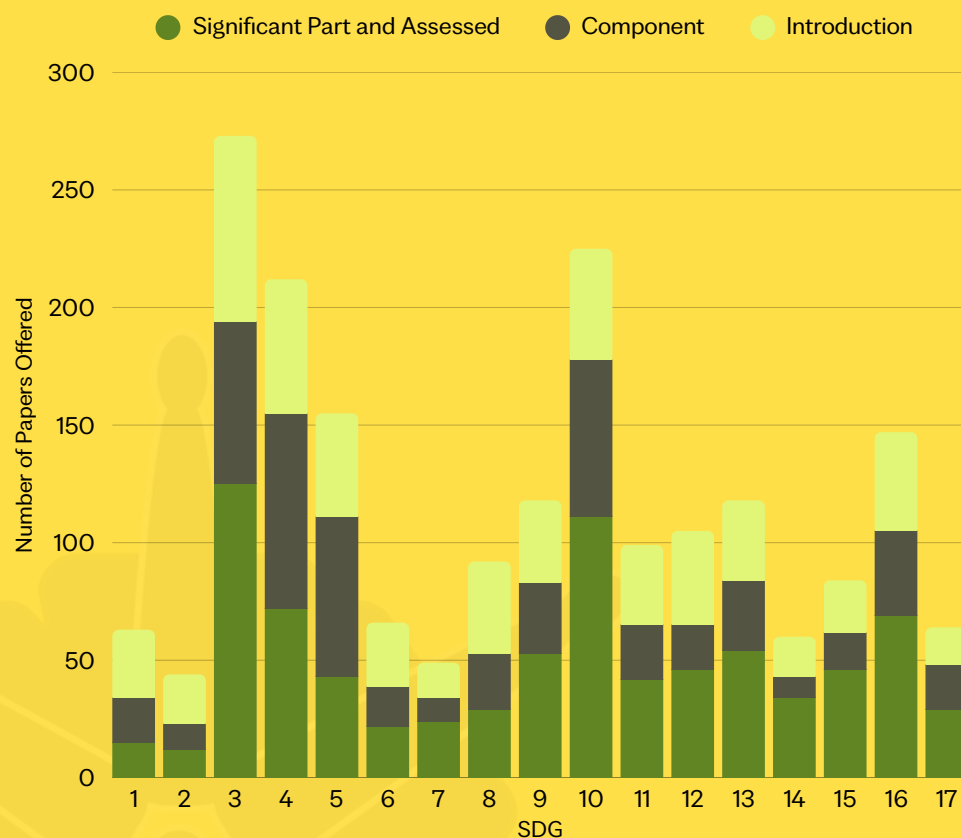
These data indicate that we have **scale** of delivery (400k+ relevant paper enrolments), **breadth** of delivery (all 4 divisions), **depth** of delivery (50%+ at significant and assessed sustainability elements), and **diversity** of delivery (contributions to all SDGs).

One of the most effective ways to integrate learning about sustainability is through living labs and community links. In the 2025 survey, 281 (51%) papers integrated activities in communities outside of the University to explore sustainability, and 89 (16%) used the campus as a living lab for sustainability learning.

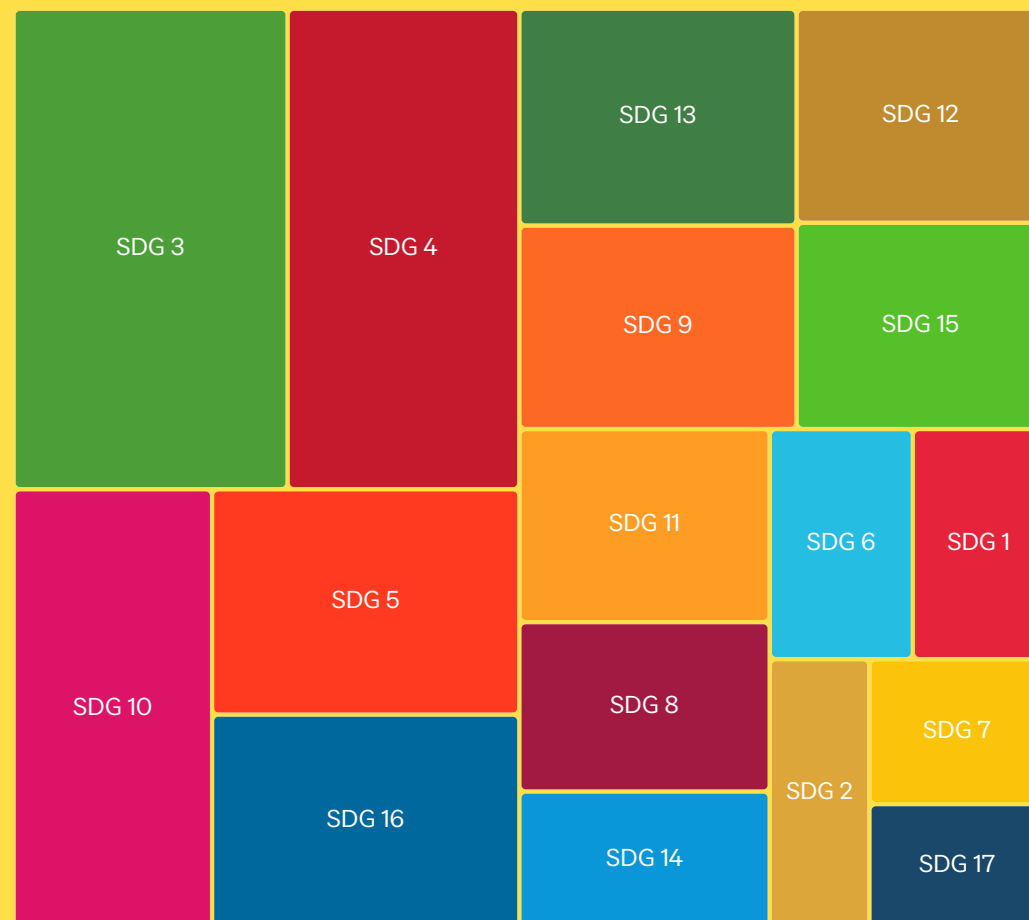
“Opportunities to develop sustainability literacy and practice are embedded in all study pathways”.



Number of papers and extent of alignment.



SDG Aligned Enrollments 2023-2025



While this survey excludes many papers due to non-responses, them not being delivered in 2025, or being project/research papers without content specific learning outcomes, it still presents a strong picture of sustainability being integrated across study pathways. The Curriculum Management System Project is working on systemising the integration of this data so that it is more readily available and more complete in the future.

Education for Circularity

The range of sustainability aligned papers continues to grow. A great example is a new paper focused on providing students with the skills and knowledge to create more circularity in how resources of all sorts are used.

SCNC 503: Resources, design and sustainability is a 20 point paper at postgraduate level available for students in the MSc, MSustBus, and other postgraduate programmes by agreement.

The paper aims to embed the principles of sustainable and regenerative design with responsible resource use and processes. A whole lifecycle approach is taken for materials and products, services and systems and their impact. Students will go through a sustainable design process to develop initiatives that furthers Aotearoa/New Zealand's sustainability goals and the SDGs. The paper was developed for the taught version of the MSc and is a sister paper to the popular summer school paper MATS 204: Treasure or Trash: The Sustainability of Materials.

It is important that students understand the theory, but also understand the complexity of application. The paper includes recorded interviews of local businesses, community groups etc who are putting sustainability and responsible resource use into practice. Students also have to undertake a sustainability challenge with measurable goals, while doing the paper. Experts in fields such as computing, engineering, marketing, entrepreneurship, design, and cultural sustainability contribute their expertise.

Students taking this paper will come out with an understanding of how to better navigate the complexity of making sustainable use of resources, products, services and systems. They will then be able to apply this to every aspect of their life and work to support the SDGs and help Aotearoa/New Zealand thrive.





SO MUCH MORE THAN A CAMPUS THRIFT STORE

Te Oraka has evolved from a student-led thrift store into a multifaceted programme delivering meaningful impact across sustainability, wellbeing, and community connection.

Today, Te Oraka operates as a vibrant, high-engagement space that supports the student experience at the University of Otago. Functioning as a circular economy initiative, all revenue generated is reinvested directly into student-focused outcomes, ensuring the model remains both sustainable and purpose-driven.

Through its activities, Te Oraka contributes to reducing financial barriers for students, fostering a strong sense of belonging, and promoting environmentally responsible practices aligned with the care of Papatūānuku. Its inclusive and community-oriented approach has enabled it to respond dynamically to student needs, exceeding initial expectations and broadening its impact.

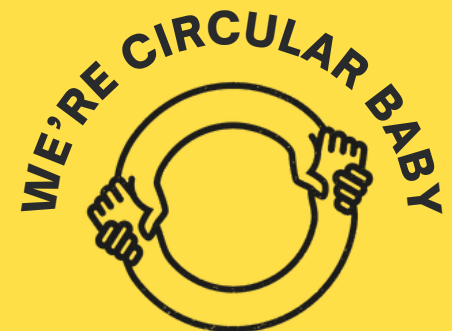
Over the past year, more than 12,000 students have engaged with Te Oraka, collectively contributing to the growth of a values-driven community that supports affordability, connection, and environmental stewardship.



For Papatūānuku and her
tāngata



Affordable access to
sustainable solutions



Championing a circular
economy



2.5 tons of clothing diverted from landfill



117 pre-loved bikes sold



861 paid student hours



5,995 students attended across 21 events



75 hours of academic projects were supported



524.5kgs of student donations



633 volunteer hours



12,351 students through the door



176 student business items sold



3 summer scholarships funded



3,455 store transactions



\$680 donated with Heavy Breathers



238kgs of clothing swapped

teoraka



378 e-rescue items sold in store



111% increase in sales from 2024

SOCIAL IMPACT STUDIO

The Social Impact Studio connects students with opportunities to volunteer, lead, and reflect, helping to create graduates equipped not just with academic expertise, but with the values, relational awareness, and civic commitment that Ōtepoti and the wider world need.

Demand for volunteer and community experience has been strong, with an increase of 240% in volunteer applications through the Priceless platform of opportunities. Through UniCrew's in-house community programmes, 380 students contributed 2,924 hours of service to the Ōtepoti Dunedin community — a wage-replacement value of \$84,649.

2025 also marked the inaugural year of two new programmes embedding leadership and global citizenship into student life. The Emerging Leaders Programme engaged 299 students across 11 categories of co-curricular learning, while the Global Impact Scholar Programme provided 92 international and exchange students with a structured pathway to connect with Ōtepoti Dunedin through community service.

Together, these programmes represent an intentional approach to how the University contributes to the wellbeing of the wider community as well as the development of the whole student.

The year concluded with the development of The Place Project, which is a new, community-led partnership with South Dunedin and Caversham that will deepen the University's civic presence in those communities for years to come.



E kore e riro, he tī tāmōre

Research for sustainability



Credit Where Credit is Due

There is a long established methodology for identifying research that relates to Sustainability. Relevance to each SDG is established based on a bank of key words for which the title, abstract, tags, keywords, and text of a research outputs are searched.

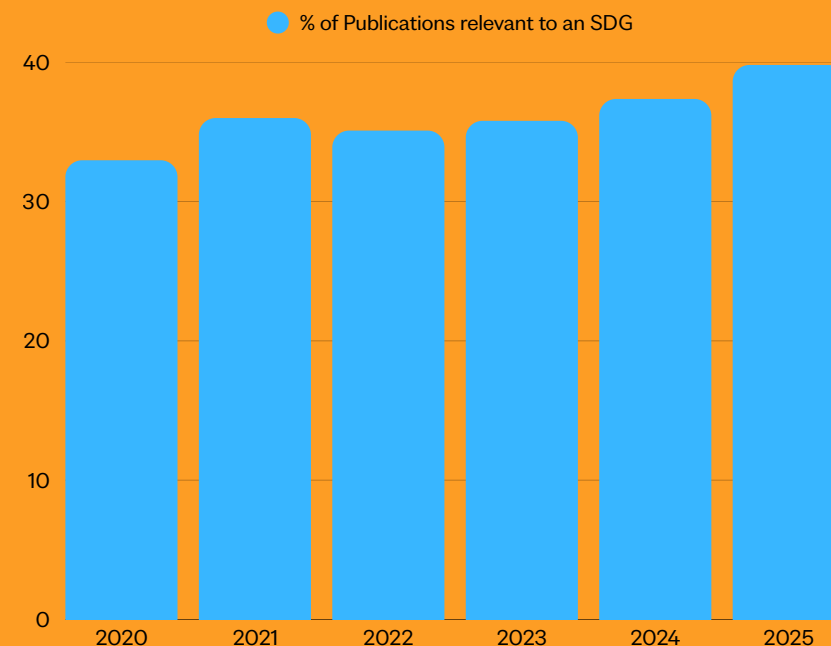
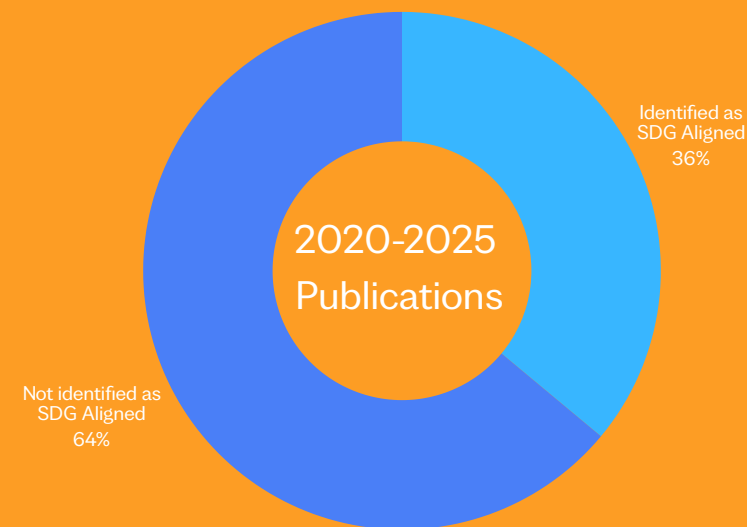
The Library has provided some guidance on how to get your work recognised in this way via this page [Research Metrics and Impact: Broader Impact.](#)

While SciVal is the tool often used for rankings, we have used Dimensions to describe the alignment of research to SDGs. This is because Dimensions scrutinises a wider set of outputs, and therefore provides a fuller and more authentic picture of our contribution.

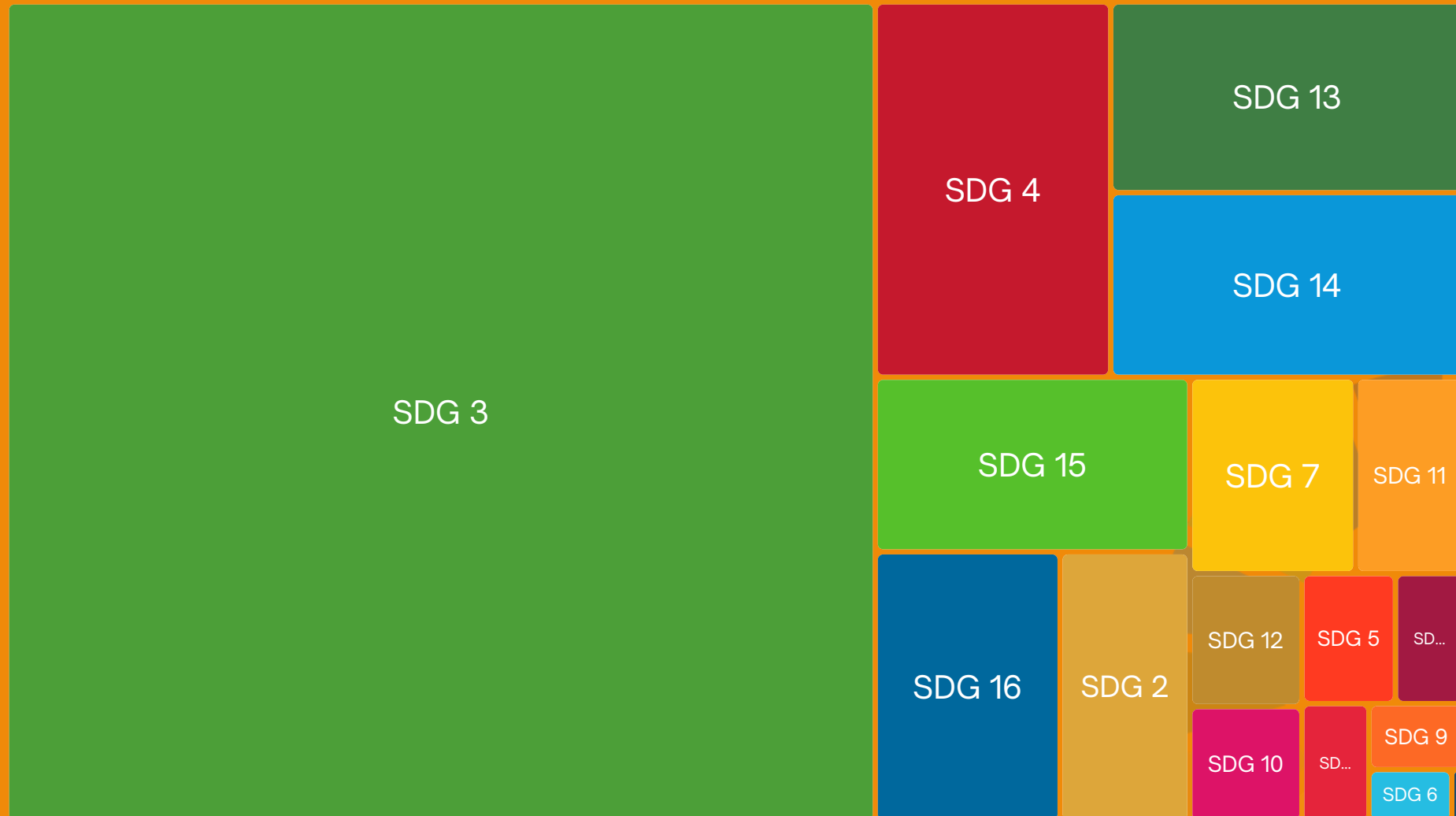
Searching for all SDG showed that almost 36% of University of Otago's research publications contributed to one or more SDGs (mean 2020-2025). There was a steady year to year increase in the number of SDG aligned publications (33% in 2020 to 40% in 2025).

The next page shows how the extent to which our research related to each SDG. 62% of our SDG related publications contribute to SDG 3, and a further 31.7% from SDG 4 (7.6%), 14 (6.1%), 15 (5%), 13 (4.8%), 11 (3%), 16 (2.9%) and 7 (2.4%). This shows both a specialist contribution to health, and diversity of contribution across a wide range of areas.

[Link to Library Guidance](#)



Publications by SDG (2020-2025)



He oraka kai te rua tī

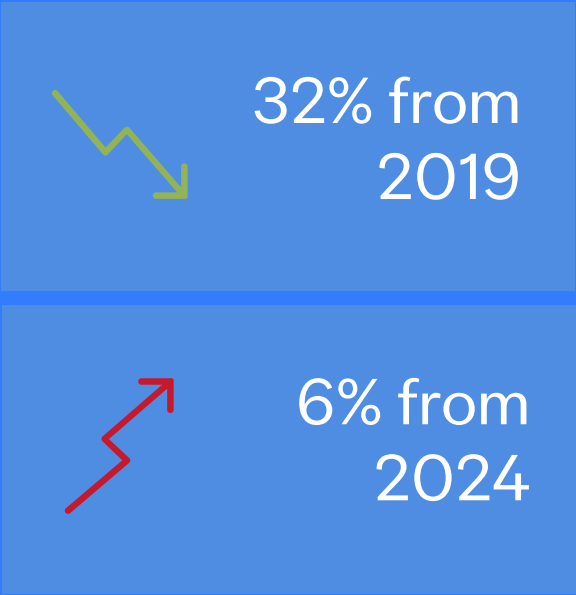
Sustainable Operations



Our Greenhouse Gas Emissions in 2025

In 2025, our total emissions of 35,830 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂-e) was 2,151 tCO₂-e (6.4%) higher than 2024, but still 32% below our 2019 base year. See next page for how we are tracking against our targets.

The main drivers of the annual increase were greater emissions from electricity (thanks to a 38% increase in national grid electricity emission factor) and food (due to growth in college resident numbers and proportionately higher red meat purchases).



NB: The University uses emissions categories from the ISO standard in its reporting. Category 1 and 2 are the same as Scope 1 and 2 in the GHG Protocol. The ISO standard breaks Scope 3 down further into categories 3-6. The University does not have any Category 5 or 6 emissions. Thus our Scope 3 emissions in 2025 were the sum of Category 3 and 4 (27,244 tCO₂e).

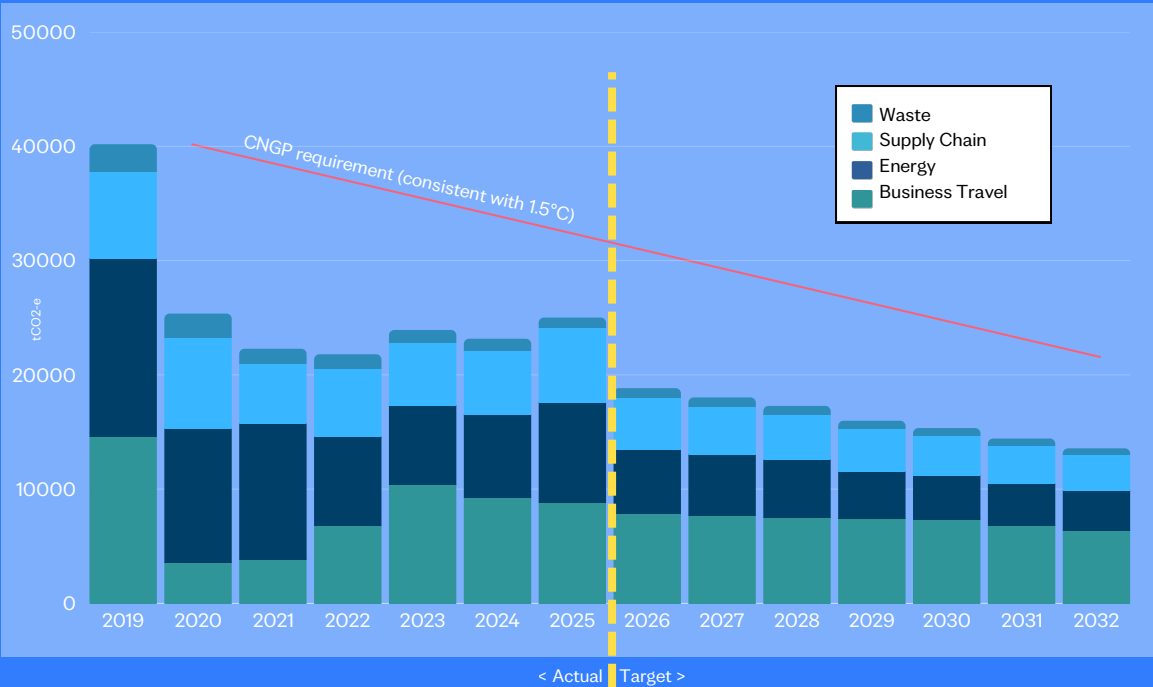
Emissions Metrics and Targets

In 2019, the University of Otago committed to reaching Net Carbon Zero by 2030, which we will do by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions as a first priority and then offsetting the emissions that we have not been able to eliminate. The University Council reconfirmed this commitment in 2021 and agreed category-based emissions reduction targets. These targets were updated once more in 2024 to reflect internal and external changes and lessons learned so far.

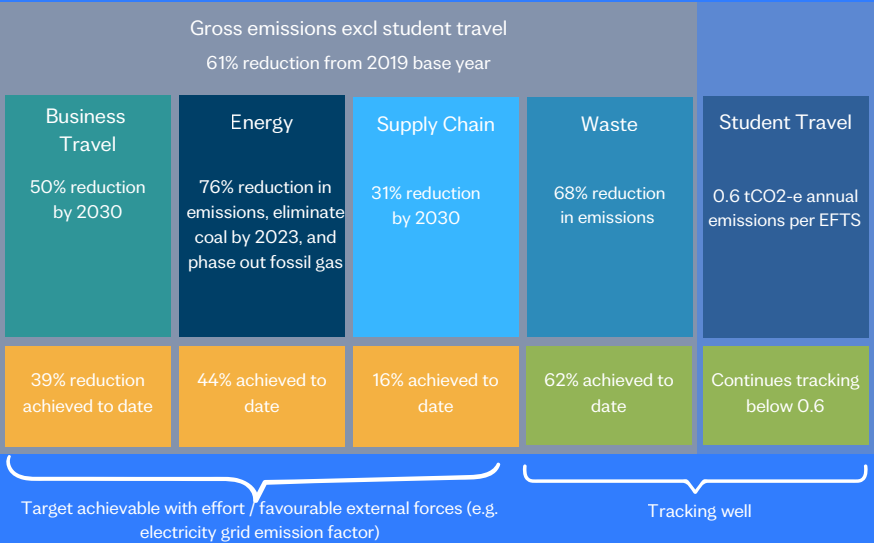
The current emission reduction targets and principles that will guide offsetting are set out in our [Journey to 2030: Island Hop #1](#) document. Targets are also summarised below.

In terms of our broader responsibility within Aotearoa, as a tertiary institution, the University of Otago is in Tranche 3 of the Carbon Neutral Government Programme (CNGP). We began reporting our emissions to the programme in 2022. While we report on student travel emissions (commuting and air travel), these are not part of CNGP targets. As the chart to the right shows, our emissions to date and our target emissions in future years are below what the CNGP defines a 1.5° compliant path.

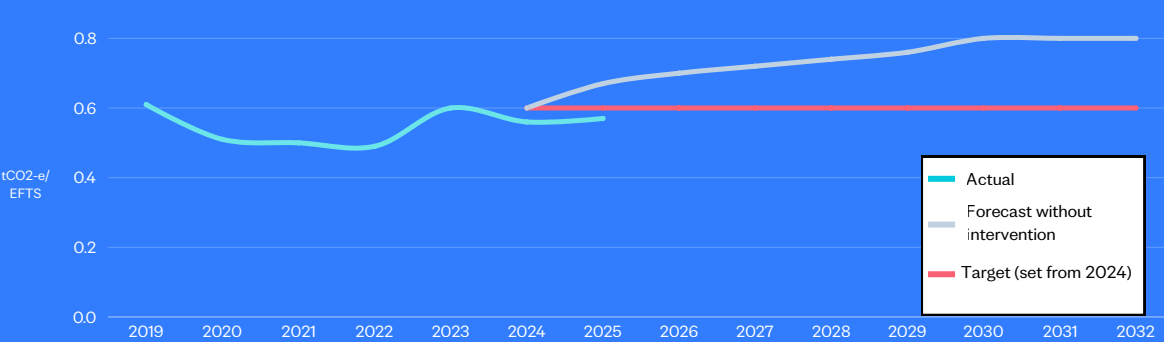
University of Otago gross emissions excluding student travel



Key emissions reduction targets 2019-2030



University of Otago student travel emissions per EFTS



Our four most material sources in 2025

Collectively, these four sources made up 78% of our total emissions in 2025.



Updated emission factors for international flights released in 2026 are 18-21% lower than previously (first update post-pandemic). This will help keep our #1 and #2 emissions sources down in 2026.

1

Student Air Travel



11% from 2019

Student air travel was the largest source of emissions in 2025, comprising 28% of total emissions. In 2025, we added an additional class of student air travel: those flights taken by medical students as part of their final year electives. Despite this extra source of emissions, student travel emissions per EFTS remains below our target thanks to the growth in international students coming from markets closer to NZ, and in full degree programmes rather than short-term exchanges.

2

Business Air Travel



45% from 2019

This covers all travel booked and/or paid for by the University. This was the number one emissions source back in 2019. Steps taken to constrain financial budgets for travel, change policies and improving reporting are helping to keep this well below pre-pandemic levels. In 2025, it made up 18% of our total emissions, a 3% decline from 2024.

3

Purchased Food



15% from 2019

This category captures the 'cradle to gate' emissions of all the food purchased for our residential colleges and on-campus catering and outlets. We use ingredient-based emissions factors so we can see the impact of different menu design and service approaches. In 2025, food made up 17% of total emissions. Overall, food emissions are 15% lower than in 2019, but increased 17% from 2024 due to higher numbers of college residents and higher proportion of red meat purchases.

4

Electricity



21% from 2019

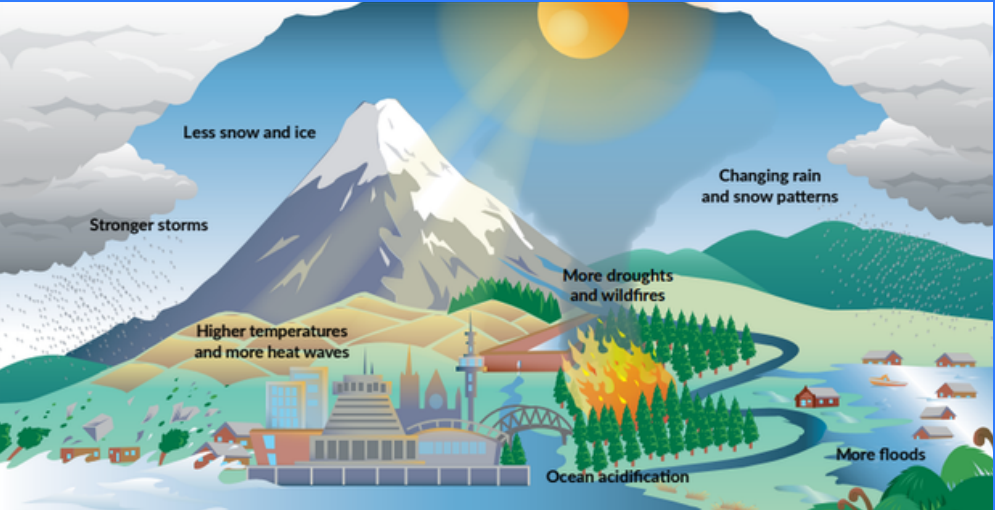
Emissions from stationary energy accounted for 8,306 tonnes of CO₂-e in 2025, with electricity making up 5,292 tCO₂-e (15% of total emissions). While electricity usage dropped 1% from 2024, emissions jumped by 37% thanks to a 38% increase in the emission factor for the national grid. The 2026 factor is back down by 22%, indicating how the emissions intensity of grid electricity is likely to fluctuate year-on-year in the near term due to the impact of dry years on hydro generation and as new renewable generation comes online. The university is installing more on-site renewable generation and investigating off-site solar solutions to reduce exposure to the grid emissions factor, price fluctuations and increase resilience.

Climate related risks

Risks and opportunities identified in 2022-2024 workshops

Future Risks
Impact of climate change on our built assets reduces viability of core business model
Impact of climate change on student study choices reduces enrolments
Impact of climate change on social license for high emissions travel
Impact of climate change on our ability to honour commitment to Te Tiriri o Waitangi.
Impact of climate change on our partners in the Pacific region
Impact of climate change on new innovations and ventures.
Impact of climate change diminishes our ability to be critic and conscience of society.
Compounding effect of climate change and other financial pressures
Impact of climate change on our long supply chain.

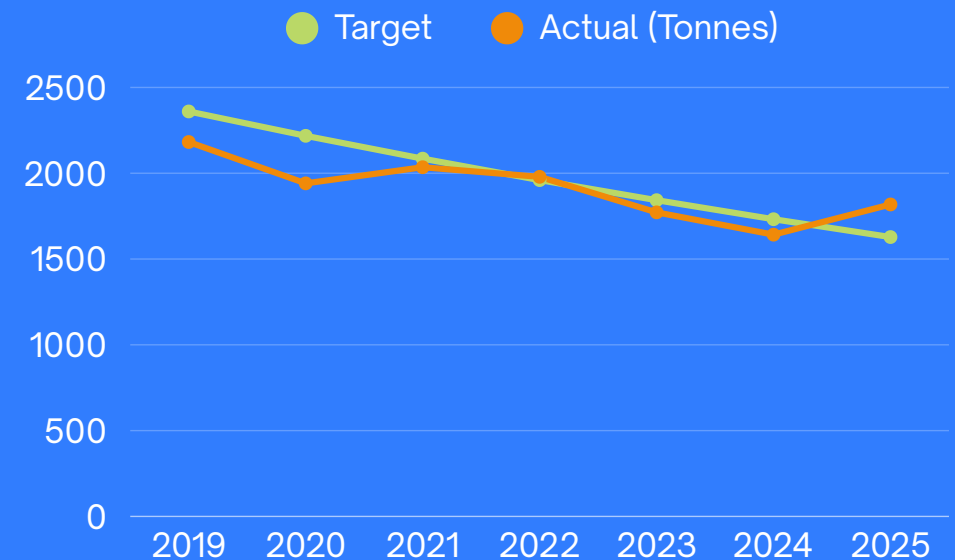
Future Opportunities
Developing online and blended offering through enhanced digital experience AI
Reduce exposure by reducing asset base (sale)
Differentiation of Otago experience
Mana Whenua leadership in increasing resilience
Develop the heath science role in climate health
Lead climate tech innovations



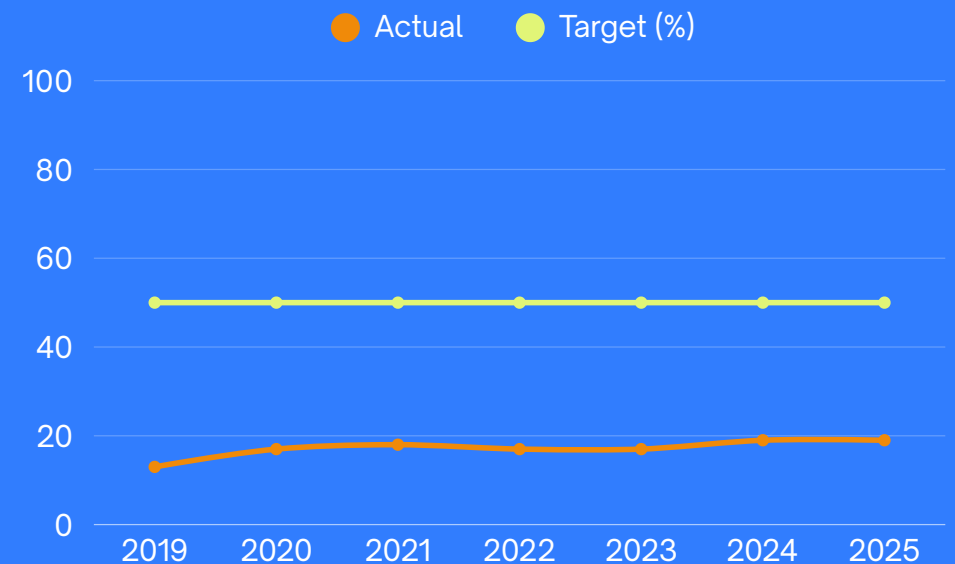
Waste Minimisation

Waste on campus is a very visible aspect of sustainability that affects all of us. The data in this section of the report is drawn directly from the externally verified data in the 2025 GHG Inventory.

Two of the KPIs that are managed by a Waste Governance group are an annual reduction in total waste and increasing the percentage of the waste diverted from landfill. The first is an ongoing 6% reduction in the total amount of waste produced including recycling, green waste and food waste diversion. The second and more challenging KPI focusses on increasing the proportion of that total waste diverted away from landfill to 50%. This includes the 19.6 tonnes of food waste diverted from college kitchens being converted to compost for use in college gardens including the sustainability neighbourhood vegetable gardens.



Reduce total waste by 6% per year.



Increase waste diverted from landfill to 50%

Sustainable Procurement

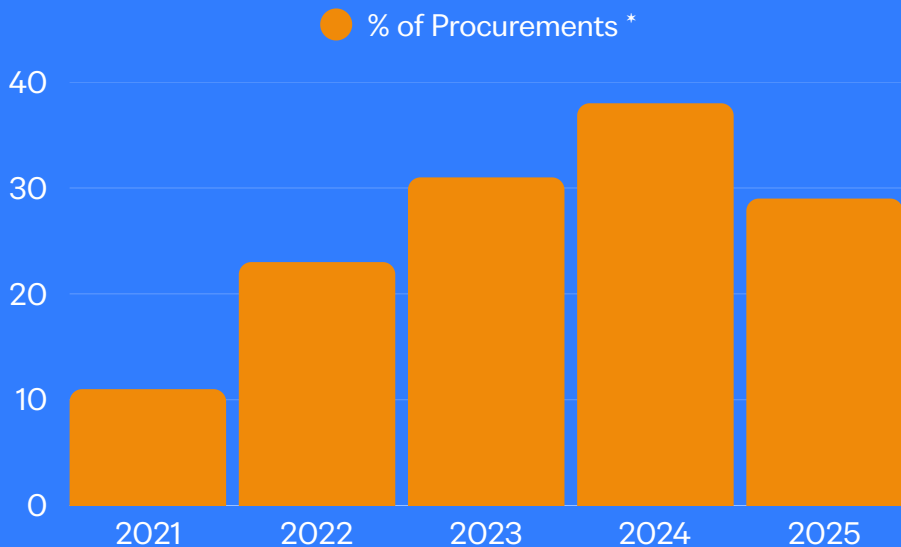
We have seen further steady progress in sustainable procurement led by the Finance Division.

While there is a slight drop in the *number* of procurement processes subject to sustainability criteria in decision making, the *total value* of those contracts increased by 54% between 2024 and 2025. There has been a total value of \$145 million in procurement decisions subject to weighted sustainability criteria between 2021 and 2025.

In 2024 the typical weighting for sustainability criteria was 4-10%. In 2025 the typical weighting was in the 11-20% range. A good example is a recent waste services procurement valued in the region of \$15M over 10 years, and sustainability criteria contributed 30% of the quality criteria for decision making.

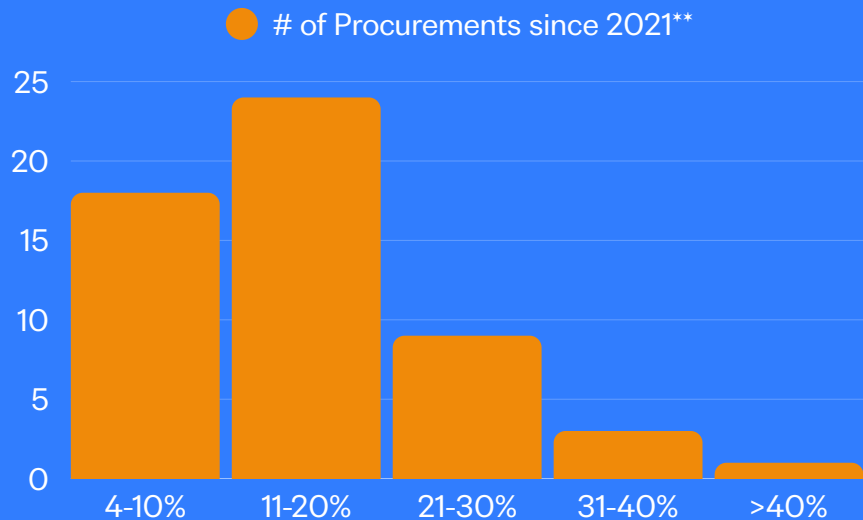
Modern Slavery legislation is again progressing through parliament. The Procurement Team have been working to be "bill ready" through involvement with the Australasian Universities Procurement Network (AUPN) and are part of several pilot programmes to identify potential risk in our supply chain.

What percentage of procurements have weighted sustainability criteria?



*Does not include procurements with sustainability questions, but no weighting.

What sustainability weighting is placed on the quality criteria?



**only showing weighting of quality criteria, not of total criteria.

Toitū te Taiao

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