



Centre for Sustainability  
Kā Rakahau o Te Ao Tūroa



## ***Strategic Plan 2020-2025***

### ***Our vision***

#### ***Whenua ora, tangata ora***

*Communities and their environments are healthy, sustainable and resilient.*

### ***Our mission***

#### ***Whanaungatanga***

*Improving wellbeing and building capability through our research, teaching and partnerships.*

### ***Our approach***

#### ***Me pēnei ka taea***

*A vibrant research culture;  
interdisciplinary and innovative;  
fostering and sharing new knowledge and ideas;  
incorporating multi-cultural knowledge;  
demonstrating leadership;  
inspiring change.*

# Ngā pou

## Our strategic goals

### 1. Whakatipu mana tangata : grow inspirational people

#### 1.1 Expand the frontiers of sustainability research

- Advance academic leadership in our current areas of research (including climate change mitigation and adaptation; kaitiakitanga; sustainable energy, food and agriculture; and community resilience) and seek to develop new focus areas in topics critical for a sustainable and resilient future.
- Foster novel interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and post-disciplinary approaches.
- Develop and champion innovative sustainability solutions, including those developed from mātauranga and other Indigenous knowledge systems.

#### 1.2 Apply Indigenous research excellence

- Develop the Centre's capacity and capability to undertake Māori and Pasifika research.
- Deliver innovations and outcomes led from Maori and Indigenous research.
- Expand and deepen research collaborations and partnerships with Māori and Pasifika communities.

#### 1.3 Catalyse change for a sustainable future

- Become Aotearoa New Zealand's most respected source of research-informed solutions and advice on sustainability issues.
- Produce locally-relevant and internationally-significant research findings and outcomes.
- Stimulate stakeholder conversations, learning, collaborations and action.
- Have global influence through our international relationships, adoption of our findings, and our alumni.

#### 1.4 Communicate widely

- Publish research findings in leading academic journals and conferences.
- Encourage publishing of open access articles, and seek funding sources to make this possible.
- Share research findings with non-academic audiences through face-to-face engagement and creative use of multiple media.
- Help empower our research end-users to achieve their desired sustainability and resilience outcomes.

### 2. Whāngaihia kia toa : nurture our people to become strong and resilient

#### 2.1 Sustain and evolve the Centre's unique culture

- Maintain the practices and traditions that make the Centre an inclusive, friendly and supportive place to work.
- Develop and apply manaakitanga and whanaungatanga practices within the Centre and with our research partners.

- Engage kaumatua/kuia/emeritus professors in contributing their wisdom to the Centre's operations and strategy.

## **2.2 Support new and emerging researchers**

- Nurture our postgraduate students and post-doctoral fellows to become future sustainability leaders.
- Pursue new partnerships and funding sources to support postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and community-based researchers.
- Grow the number of postgraduate students at the Centre, with an increasing proportion of Māori and Pasifika students.
- Host summer scholarship students and/or interns to give opportunities for undergraduate students to experience a research environment.

## **3. Whakapakari te katoa : co-operate, strengthen all as one**

### **3.1 Strengthen our relationships within the University**

- Contribute to the School of Geography and other departments through research collaborations, service, co-supervision and research-led teaching.
- Invite University of Otago researchers whose work aligns with the Centre's mission to become research associates.
- Improve connectivity between research themes/centres/groups that have a sustainability focus and influence the development of a wider university sustainability vision
- Pursue opportunities for Centre staff to contribute to relevant University decision-making forums and committees.

### **3.2 Strengthen our local and national relationships**

- Develop new collaborations with Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu, Papatipu Runaka, Te Ao Marama and Aukaha to support Ngāi Tahu aspirations for research and capability-building.
- Develop and strengthen relationships with stakeholders nationally (iwi, communities, councils, businesses, councils, governments etc) and co-develop new research proposals.
- Develop and maintain collaborations with aligned research institutions.

### **3.3 Strengthen our international reach**

- Invite and host international visitors.
- Secure funded international fellowships for visitors and/or Centre staff international visits.
- Expand our participation in internationally-funded projects.
- Strengthen our relationships with leading international research networks that have a focus on sustainability and resilience.

## **4. Whanake whakamua : grow and move onwards**

### **4.1 Develop our research capability**

- Ensure the Centre has sufficient skilled professional staff to support the development and delivery of the Centre's activities.

- Develop clear pathways and funding options for bringing in new research staff and postdoctoral fellows in strategic skill areas.
- Secure funding to gradually increase research staff to at least 10 FTE, at least half being Māori and Pasifika.
- Broaden the expertise of our researchers and research associates to include fields beyond social sciences (e.g. physical sciences, health, commerce, arts).
- Create opportunities for relevant academic staff from other departments to become more closely involved in the Centre, including through hosting them through their Research and Study Leave, co-supervision and involvement in research proposals
- Seek to supervise postgraduate students whose topics and skills align with the Centre's strategic goals.

#### **4.2 Improve our financial resilience**

- Grow external research funding with a portfolio of short- and long-term projects.
- Advocate for research centres to have more stable base funding.
- Secure long-term external funding for strategic initiatives including targeted academic positions, fellowships and postgraduate scholarships.
- Contribute to research-informed teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
- Work with the School of Geography to establish a taught Masters in Sustainability.

#### **4.3 Operate effectively and strategically**

- Explore alternative leadership/directorship models and establish the model that will best support the Centre's evolution as per this Strategic Plan.
- Maintain a Management Committee of academic and professional staff.
- Involve all staff in helping manage aspects of the Centre and developing their leadership potential.
- Maintain the kaiāwhina position to provide support to staff and students in building their capacity to undertake Māori research including familiarity with Te Ao Māori.
- Ensure professional and research staff are well supported and have access to professional development.
- Ensure sufficient and accurate financial advice is available for the Centre to be able to fully understand its financial position and to make strategic decisions.
- Hold at least 3 meetings a year with our Advisory Board, which will include tracking progress against this Strategic Plan annually.

## **About the Centre for Sustainability : Ka Rakahau o Te Ao Tūroa**

The Centre for Sustainability is a premier research centre of the University of Otago, with an international reputation for its innovative interdisciplinary research, across a number of fields including aspects of kaitiakitanga, climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable food and agriculture, resilient communities, natural hazards, energy, mobility and biodiversity.

The Centre was established in 2000 and is part of the School of Geography within the Division of Humanities. Centre researchers and research associates are from a wide range of disciplines including from Science, Commerce, Health and Humanities Divisions. Centre personnel comprise fulltime and part time researchers, support staff, postgraduate students (mainly PhDs) and emeritus professors. We also frequently host summer scholarship students, interns, visiting scholars on research leave from elsewhere at the University of Otago, and visiting international academics and PhD students for short or extended stays.

The rationale for the Centre is that human demands are exceeding environmental capacities, and that the wellbeing of current and future generations of humans and non-human species are seriously threatened. Human society will also be increasingly exposed to natural hazards, including from earth system processes and climate change. Significant changes are required to systems of production and consumption, and in human expectations, practices and relationships with the environment. Our research seeks implementable solutions to these issues by incorporating social along with technical and/or physical sciences, as well as mātauranga and local/experiential knowledge. Our work generally aligns with the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

### **Te puāwaitanga : What we do**

As a research-focused Centre, we seek opportunities to inform, shape and influence positive change at many levels. Within the Centre, we build capacity and capability amongst our postgraduate students and staff. Within the University, we help build sustainability-related knowledge and collaborations within the University's academic and general staff and students. Within Otago, we engage with and help support local runaka, the Dunedin public, councils, businesses and NGOs on sustainability issues. Nationally, we develop strategic relationships with government, Māori communities and organisations, businesses, NGOs and sector groups to understand the issues they face, develop research collaborations, and influence change. Through our research and outreach generally we seek to assist Aotearoa New Zealand to become more sustainable and more resilient. We also seek to be internationally influential through our research collaborations, conference presentations and publications.

Our primary activity as a Centre is undertaking externally-funded research, delivering excellent academic publications and translating our findings into user-relevant insights. Māori focused research

has always been an important part of the Centre's activities, totalling around 25% of the Centre's total externally funded research over 2010-2019. Research staff based at the Centre lead or contribute to bid preparation, research delivery, and communication of research findings. Many projects emerge from relationships developed with stakeholders such as iwi, communities, councils, businesses and government agencies and most involve collaborations with other researchers based elsewhere across the University or in research institutions in Aotearoa-New Zealand and internationally.

Our second key focus is on postgraduate students undertaking research degrees in topics aligned with the Centre's mission. We are regularly approached by prospective students, and are limited only by the capacity of research staff at the Centre to supervise students.

The Centre is known as a place for connecting people, by hosting meetings and seminars for pan-university groups, or linking university and external groups that have common interests. We communicate our research widely and in accessible ways, both through regular seminars and workshops at the Centre, and directly with our stakeholders using a wide variety of communication methods. We also engage with these stakeholders to discover what issues they are concerned about and how we might collaborate to find solutions.

The Centre is internationally known for and through the quality of its research and research collaborations, and also through its alumni and visitors. Our frequent hosting of international visitors is a strength which contributes to the Centre, to the University and to the Otago community more widely.

## **A mātou tikanga : our culture**

While each of our research staff has an excellent foundation in a specific discipline or disciplines, our particular point of difference is our commitment to interdisciplinarity and collaborative research. Our interdisciplinary research is demonstrated by collaborations between Centre researchers and people located in other departments and institutions.

We value diversity and are committed to inclusiveness supporting and encouraging one another and celebrating our successes.

Māori concepts and perspectives are woven into our organisational culture, and are central to many of our research programmes. We welcome the insights that come from bringing together different ways of understanding the world and we support the development of new and emerging Māori researchers.

The quality of our research is supported by the culture of the Centre as a community of researchers and support staff who are passionate about sustainability, who value openness and are committed to the sharing of ideas. We appreciate the mix of perspectives brought from having people from

many countries, disciplines and cultures. We are a flexible workplace and recognise the wider context of people's lives, including the importance of their families.

As well as our research, we take a lead in stimulating thinking and action about sustainability within the University and in Society more widely. We provide opportunities for learning and discussions, we model sustainable behaviour, and we contribute to media and events where sustainability issues are discussed.

Our work is enriched by the genuine committed relationships that have developed with people who have spent time at the Centre as researchers, visitors and students; with other researchers at the Otago campus, elsewhere in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally; and with the communities, iwi, businesses and government agencies with whom we work. These long-term relationships are an important part of our identity.

### **A muri ake nei : the future**

The operating environment for the Centre is evolving. The University of Otago is now committed to a sustainability agenda, and key stakeholders such as councils, businesses, iwi and government are increasingly aligning themselves with sustainable, resilient and low-carbon futures. Our experience and track record stand us in good stead here. The 2019 Review of the Centre was strongly supportive of the Centre and provides guidance on key areas for future development, which are incorporated into this Strategic Plan.

The impact of Covid-19 from early 2020 will have ongoing repercussions for society, the economy, and the Centre's operating environment, but creates an opportunity for Aotearoa New Zealand to shift to a sustainable pathway.

With these emerging opportunities we seek to become even better at developing solutions to complex problems, including through applying scientific expertise; Māori knowledge and worldviews; incorporating traditional, practitioner and local knowledge; undertaking interdisciplinary research; incorporating new and emerging perspectives that support just transitions; developing transdisciplinary approaches; working at the nexus of different fields of study; and developing innovations in theory as well as practice.

We have an excellent team of researchers and aspire to further increase our Māori research capacity, to develop strength in Pasifika research, and to continue to attract expert researchers with complementary disciplinary expertise. The main challenges we face are in the lack of long-term funding (being mainly reliant on research contracts) and difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff due to the short-term nature of many contracts. These challenges are addressed in this Strategic Plan.