

Tutukaka Coast community research

Key findings from community engagement and survey

This document details key findings from research with residents of the Tutukaka Coast undertaken in mid-2021, to explore community strengths and priorities, and identify learning from the experience of COVID-19 and the 2021 tsunami alert. The research was undertaken on behalf of the Tutukaka Coast Ratepayers and Residents Association.

A mixed methods approach was adopted for the study, consisting of a review of secondary data sources; a community survey, with 675 local people participating; and a series of interviews and focus groups.

Connecting and valuing the Tutukaka Coast

Most participants in the survey were residents of the area (71%) and some had a whānau or historical connection to the coast additional to living in the area (19%). Other respondents had a holiday home in the area (17%) or had a historical connection but did not live in the area (11%). Two-thirds had a connection to Matapouri-Tutukaka (67%), followed by Ngunguru (64%), with a smaller group having a connection to Kiripaka (14%). Over half of participants (54%) reported a connection to the coast of more than 20 years. This was followed by those with a connection between 11 and 20 years (16%), and a connection between six and ten years (14%). Participants in the focus groups and interviews had a range of connections to the area: some had whānau links and others had moved to the Tutukaka Coast due to the attraction of its natural environment or suitability for raising a family.

Key areas of value that participants saw in the Tutukaka Coast included 'beaches and the coast' (91%); marine environment (69%); native bush and wildlife (68%); and a strong sense of community (50%). Other responses included a safe place to bring up children (42%); connection to the land/whenua (39%); whānau and family (37%); and all necessities being catered for (33%). The diversity and creativity of the community and opportunity to lead a balanced lifestyle were also valued by residents.

Connection to the land and whenua, and whānau and family, were more commonly raised by Māori participants in the survey. Participants that were aged 44 years or under were more likely to value the Tutukaka Coast as a safe place to bring up children, compared to older age groups. Participants aged 65 years and over were more likely to report that all necessities were catered for on the Tutukaka Coast, compared with younger age groups.

Social and economic priorities

The most pressing or important social or economic issues in the community were cited as pressures created by the influx of tourists (67%); road safety (63%); limited public transport (41%); criminal activity (39%); housing availability or costs (34%); access to basic amenities (26%); limited cell phone/Wi-Fi coverage (23%); and jobs/employment (17%). Māori were more likely than non-Māori to raise concerns of housing availability or costs, poverty and economic hardship, jobs and employment, and prejudice or racism. Housing availability or cost was raised as more of a pressure by participants aged 44 years and under, compared to older participants.

Suggestions for improving the wellbeing of residents included building stronger community connections (including with mana whenua), more community activities and meeting places, and increased local employment.

Environmental sustainability

The most widely indicated environmental issue was dumping of rubbish in public areas (62%); followed by decreased levels of kaimoana (59%); invasive plants (49%); and the decline of marine biodiversity (47%). Other environmental issues included water quality (46%); increased sediment (44%); erosion (35%); flooding/power cuts (20%); and preparedness for a civil defence emergency (20%). The declining marine biodiversity and water quality, and in particular the reduced levels of kaimoana, were more commonly noted by Māori respondents than non-Māori.

General solutions put forward to ensure environmental sustainability included education and more community-led action; consultation with tangata whenua and other community members; effective leadership; legislative changes; and a long term and holistic approach.

Services, facilities and amenities

Services, facilities and amenities reported as being generally or well served in the area were beaches, recreation opportunities, boating facilities, and trade services. Services and facilities that could be categorised as being reasonably well served included sporting facilities, rubbish collection, forest and bush walks, shops and parks. Those that were less well served were roads and footpaths.

Experiences and impacts of COVID-19 pandemic

Almost three-quarters (73%) of survey participants stayed on the Tutukaka Coast during the March-May 2020 lockdowns. For many respondents, this was seen as a time where they felt safe, that was quiet and peaceful, that provided valuable time with whānau or family, and that elicited a strong community response. Examples of community support during this time included people checking in or shopping for others, food parcels provided by the Ngunguru marae, and the role played by the local shops. For a minority of people, however, lockdown was a time of stress, isolation, family conflict, and financial pressure, and for whom the challenges of this time were significant.

Emergency planning

Almost three-quarters (72%) of survey participants were in the area during the 2021 tsunami alert and there were reports of effective community support and a generally efficient evacuation. Issues highlighted included some vulnerable residents feeling overlooked or isolated, and a lack of facilities in places where people congregated. Most (84%) were aware of a civil defence evacuation plan in the event of a tsunami.

Overall, participants thought that the community was reasonably prepared for future emergencies (11% a great deal, 55% a reasonable amount). A range of priorities were noted for future emergency planning, including a register of safe locations for residents to evacuate to (70%), followed by facilities and shelter available on higher ground, and a system for checking in on the elderly/vulnerable (67% each). Others noted were better communication of emergency plans (44%), food being available on higher ground (43%), and a more coordinated response (24%).

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