

# STRATEGIC ROADMAP

2026–2031

---

TE PĀ HONO – A PLACE  
OF CONNECTION



## Introduction

When our Zoo first opened its doors in December 1922, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland was home to just 85,000 people, and fewer than two billion people lived on the planet. Today, our city has grown to more than 1.7 million, and we share a world with 8.3 billion other humans and where monitored wildlife populations have declined by an average of 73% since 1970. We are in a watershed decade: biodiversity is in steep decline, and global pressures – from climate change and human conflict to rapid urban growth and growing social inequity – shape the environment in which we must operate.

Our updated Strategic Roadmap (2026–2031) outlines how Auckland Zoo will respond to these realities. Rather than being overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge, we choose audacious hope and pragmatic action – experimenting, learning, and scaling innovations that we, as a community-connected urban zoo, are uniquely positioned to catalyse. We will strengthen partnerships, broaden our reach, and increase our impact so we can deliver on our Mission and Seven Strategic Commitments with practical optimism.

The years ahead will bring shifting political conditions, tighter public and philanthropic budgets, rising fixed costs, rapid technological change, and intensifying environmental threats. These forces create both risk and opportunity, calling on us to be an evidence-based, trusted voice for nature and for people; to innovate how we fund and deliver our work; to harness new tools for research and engagement; and to remain agile as our operating environment changes.

Scientific research is emphatically clear on the value of spending time in nature – for health, for belonging, for meaning. By providing restorative, inclusive spaces and nature-based pathways to health, we serve as an accessible ‘green gateway’ – a place of connection – where currently, 90% of our visitors agree that their time with us has a positive impact on their personal wellbeing and 84% feel closer to nature after a visit to our Zoo.

Our organisational purpose as a modern zoo continues to evolve with clarity and conviction and we can now view our potential for impact – our purpose – as being on two main ‘fronts’. Fronts that are largely defined in terms of timescale.

The short-term front – the urgent response – is the species conservation work that most good zoos around the world now define themselves by. Using our set of intensive wildlife management skills, research skills, cutting edge technology, community engagement and advocacy skills within the Zoo and in the wild – a cohort of resources that only a good zoo can muster – to help protect species and their habitats from the immediate threat of disappearance.

We are proud of our recent work with a wide variety of critically threatened endemic New Zealand species. Indeed, there are species that, without our work in the Zoo and in the wild over the last ten years, would likely now be extinct. We will continue to grow our activity and reach where our intensive wildlife management skills have the biggest impact, in partnership with iwi, with the Department of Conservation, and with other like-minded organisations, and we



will continue to help prevent endemic invertebrate, fish, amphibian, reptile and bird species from disappearing.

We have helped prevent these species going extinction by what we and our partners do. It is vital work, and we need to do a lot more of it. However, these species aren't really 'saved'. We've temporarily prevented their extinction, but they will continue to be dependent on human intervention indefinitely for their survival.

Furthermore, in New Zealand, there are now more than 4,000 native species threatened with extinction or at risk of becoming threatened. Globally, it is estimated that there are around a million facing extinction. So, a species-by-species conservation approach is not going to provide the scale of response required to turn things around – not for our country and not for our planet. The numbers just don't stack up. There are not enough zoos, not enough space, not enough time to get to them all. A species conservation approach can therefore

only be the short-term solution – the short-term front. It is a 'Band-Aid' fix that serves to buy us a little more time. It is a critical point in our journey, but not our destination, and it should therefore only be a part of the purpose of Auckland Zoo.

The long-term front, our longer term purpose, the permanent fix, and the destination we all need to be navigating towards, is a future where 'Band-Aid' species conservation approaches are no longer required. A future where there has been a paradigm shift in the human relationship with our environment, and where we think, feel and act as a part of nature rather than apart from nature.

Over the next five years we will commit to developing and delivering programmes that support and catalyse the social, cultural and systemic shifts required for this long-term purpose of ecological and human wellbeing. We will do this with an inextinguishable hope and with practical optimism – with a belief grounded in evidence that collective action can and will make the difference we need to see.

To guide this transformation, we have developed Te Ara Pā Hono, our whakapapa-based strategic lens. Translating as 'the pathway of connection,' it seeks to integrate Western science with the Māori worldview, which recognises that humans are an interconnected part of the environment, rather than separate from it. That the wellbeing of people and the wellbeing of our planet are inextricably linked and entirely interdependent.

In partnership with iwi, we are weaving mātauranga Māori through our storytelling, our experiences and our physical spaces, so that Auckland Zoo becomes increasingly distinctive of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and of Aotearoa New Zealand. Our places, programmes and practices will increasingly reflect local histories, language and responsibilities to land and waters. By authentically integrating te ao Māori we strengthen our identity as **Te Pā Hono** – the place of connection – a post-colonial organisation that speaks with a uniquely woven voice on stewardship and care for **te taiao** – the environment, the natural world, and the people within it.

This journey is not driven by compliance, but by a desire to contribute to the development of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland's unique emerging identity and voice, fostering a profound sense of belonging where everyone feels an innate connection to the land, to the waters, and to our city.

Auckland Zoo will always be stronger as part of a wider whānau. Our place within Tātaki Auckland Unlimited and the Auckland Council family gives us shared responsibility for our city's cultural and environmental wellbeing. This alliance enables coordinated

action across environmental projects, learning programmes, sustainability initiatives, and community engagement – amplifying our ability to support a resilient, healthy, liveable city.

Beyond conservation and nature-connectedness, the Zoo also contributes significantly to tourism and the local economy, supporting jobs, local businesses, and enhancing Auckland's reputation as a destination known for its nature and its culture.

This Strategic Roadmap commits us to measurable conservation outcomes, deeper integration of indigenous knowledge, programmes that enhance wellbeing, and new ways of engaging Aucklanders throughout their lives. It also commits us to organisational resilience – diversifying revenue, adopting new technologies responsibly, and ensuring our governance and legal frameworks remain fit for purpose. Success will be measured not only by the species we help, but by the behavioural and policy shifts we influence.

The work of Auckland Zoo as Te Pā Hono is a shared endeavour. The animals we care for, our staff, volunteers, iwi, partners, and the people of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will all shape how this Strategic Roadmap comes to life. We will be bold where the science and our values demand it, humble where we must learn, and steadfast in our commitment to a future where people and nature flourish together.

**Kevin Buley**  
Director, Auckland Zoo

March 2026

# Our Strategic Roadmap 2026–2031

Our Mission remains the same as it has been since 2012: **‘To bring people together to build a future for wildlife.’** However, this updated Strategic Roadmap elevates that Mission through the unifying idea of **Kā Hono, Kā Ora** – that through growing connections, we will nurture life and elevate wellbeing for all.

Over the next five years, our Seven Strategic Commitments, reenvisioned through Te Ara Pā Hono, will guide this journey.

Each of the Seven Commitments in the Strategic Roadmap has specific goals. In turn, each of these goals has a series of initiatives and projects with outcomes, targets and measures that will enable the

delivery of our commitments to people and to wildlife, to be tracked over the life of this five-year plan.

Our goal is to foster genuine, reciprocal relationships with iwi, with our communities, and with our partners, ensuring that every person who connects with Auckland Zoo – Te Pā Hono – feels a true sense of belonging to this land and is inspired to advocate for a flourishing world where people and nature thrive as one. This journey brings us closer to the future where we all understand that human wellbeing and environmental wellbeing cannot be separated. **Ko au te taiao, ko te taiao ko au – I am nature, and nature is me.**

Auckland Zoo’s Seven Commitments have been informed and have evolved from key local, national and international strategies, plans and guidelines. These documents included:

- **Strategic Plan, Tātaki Auckland Unlimited**
- **The Auckland Plan 2050, Auckland Council** – and the associated topic-based plans
- **Toi Whītiki, Auckland Council** – Auckland’s Arts and Culture Strategic Action Plan
- **Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri: Auckland’s Climate Plan, Auckland Council**
- **Tāmaki Ora, Auckland Council** – Māori Outcomes Performance Measurement Framework
- **Te Mahere Aronga, Tātaki Auckland Unlimited** – Māori Outcomes Plan
- **Te Mana o te Taiao, Department of Conservation** – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020
- **Committing to Conservation, World Association of Zoos and Aquarium** – Conservation Strategy, 2015
- **Social Change for Conservation, World Association of Zoos and Aquarium** – Conservation Education Strategy, 2020
- **Advancing Animal Welfare, World Association of Zoos and Aquarium** – Animal Welfare Strategy, 2025
- **Protecting our Planet, World Association of Zoos and Aquarium** – Sustainability Strategy 2020–2030
- **Sustainable Development Goals 2020–2030, United Nations 2030**

# Our Seven Commitments



## Te Pā Hono – the new te reo Māori name for Auckland Zoo

The term Pā means a defined and distinctive place – a safe, special space that can be both physical and symbolic. Hono means to connect.

Together, as Te Pā Hono, they describe Auckland Zoo as a place where experiences, knowledge, and stories come together, where communities are encouraged to engage with, and understand the world we are inextricably connected with.

## Waiata

He pou kā oho

He pou kā ora

Manaaki te tangata

Ka tupu he aka tauira

Ka tupu he aka mauri e

Manaaki i te taiao e

Ka ora te ao

*Our ability to be aware*

*Will strengthen our wellbeing*

*Our care for people*

*Will shape and nurture*

*Through understanding*

*Our environment thrives*

*A wellbeing for all*

Extract from a waiata, composed for Te Ara Pā Hono and gifted to Auckland Zoo, by Ricky-Lee Tapuni Mitai, *Whakatōhea* (1988–2024) and Haumi





## Nurturing a lifelong connection with nature

*Manaaki tāngata, tiaki taiao*



We will listen to the communities we serve to foster authentic relationships and create inspiring and meaningful experiences that nurture connections with nature. We will support and work with these communities to catalyse our collective potential to deliver better outcomes for people and the natural world.

### Commitment Goals:

- **Social licence** – Nurture and enhance understanding, trust and reputation in our diverse communities for what we do, how we do it, and why we do it
- **Happiness, fun and awe** – Amaze and inspire our communities with the wildlife and nature experiences we deliver and the environment that we create
- **Connection and action** – Advocate for wildlife, wild places, wellbeing and a shared future where people and nature thrive together



## Taking action for wildlife in the wild

*Mana tuku iho, mana tuku atu*



We will deploy our intensive wildlife management skills for species that urgently require intervention to prevent their extinction in the wild. We will support the work of our conservation partners to do the same.

### Commitment Goals:

- **Focus and prioritise** – Lead and support the preservation of priority species in the wild where Auckland Zoo can make the difference
- **Expertise and experience** – Continue to develop and deploy our specialist intensive wildlife management skills in the conservation of threatened wildlife in the zoo and in the wild
- **Conservation facilities** – Deploy our specialist conservation breeding facilities at the Zoo to support the preservation of priority species in the wild
- **Conservation partnership** – Enhance our partnerships with organisations committed to the conservation of wildlife in the wild



## Strengthening our relationship with Te Ao Māori

### *Ka whakawhenua, ka hua*



In partnership with tangata whenua and the mana whenua of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, we will weave indigenous thought and knowledge throughout our organisation to realise our potential as a zoo that is distinctively of this land.

Through our collective responsibility for the care of te taiao (the natural world), we will help shape the evolving identity and collective voice of our country for the wellbeing of Auckland and New Zealand.

#### Commitment Goals:

- **Te Ara Pā Hono** – Implement strategic framework and weave te ao Māori alongside existing Zoo knowledge and practices
- **Te Puna Waiora** – Operationally embed Te Reo Māori Capability Action Plan across the Zoo
- **Rangitupu** – Deliver 3rd stage of Physical Renewals Masterplan to create a unique Zoo experience that builds connection between visitors and the taiao
- **Mahi tahi** – Continue to build meaningful relationships and formal agreements with mana whenua and mātāwaka

## Evolving our organisation sustainably

### *He whiringa whakaaro, he whai aroaro*

We will enrich life in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland by working as part of Tātaki Auckland Unlimited and in partnership with other organisations to increase our efficiency, reach and impact.

We will help ensure our long-term vitality with innovative revenue-generating activities that align with our Mission and values as a not-for-profit organisation, and that enhance our social license to operate.

We will take an agile approach in all our activities, including the operation and renewal of our organisation, to use our resources efficiently and responsibly, and to minimise our impact on the environment.

#### Commitment Goals:

- **Environmental sustainability** – Minimise our footprint and model best practice through delivery of our Environmental Pledge
- **Capital renewal and asset management** – Continue to responsibly care for and renew the zoo site
- **Financial sustainability** – Grow our revenue streams and manage our costs to support delivery of our Mission and to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of our operation
- **Stronger together** – Increase our community reach and impact by working in partnership with other like-minded organisations – including as part of the Auckland Cultural Sector Alliance
- **Efficient use of resources** – Deliver maximum value by using our resources efficiently and transparently while minimising our waste





## Learning, training, research, and embedding science in all that we do

*He ako, he tauira, he māramatanga*



We will always take an evidence-based approach. We will use the best available data, our skills, and our experience to realise our unique potential as a good modern zoo. We will collaborate with academic and research partners who align with our values, to support those who want to contribute to positive outcomes for people and nature.

### Commitment Goals:

- **Innovation and improvement** – Take an evidence-based approach to innovation, decision-making and continuous improvement
- **Science partnership** – Enhance our relationships with tertiary and other science-driven organisations to facilitate learning, training and research opportunities that further our organisational purpose
- **Learning and training** – Deliver programmes that build capability and confidence and help develop the potential of our communities
- **Te Wai Ōrea** – Develop a plan for a cohesive precinct-wide science driven experience across Western Springs with key stakeholders



## Ensuring positive welfare outcomes through excellence in animal care

*Te tihi o te whakaaro, he manaaki*



We will continue to develop and implement exemplary practice in the care of the animals for which we are responsible, to provide each individual with the highest possible quality of life. We will be clear about how each species contributes to the delivery of our Mission, and we will ensure that all species are managed ethically and sustainably.

### Commitment Goals:

- **Progressive care** – Continue to support advances in standards of animal care and welfare outcomes
- **Role and purpose** – Ensure the animals in our care have a clear purpose that supports delivery of our Mission
- **Audit and verification** – External accrediting and regulatory agencies validate animal care and welfare standards



## Enhancing the wellbeing of our communities

*He aka hononga, he oranga tāngata*



We will embrace diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility to connect with as many people as possible from the diverse communities we serve. We will engage in programmes and activities that enhance social, physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing that help communities feel happier, function better and have positive impacts on their wider lives.

### Commitment Goals:

- **Accessible and inclusive** – Provide experiences and create an environment where everyone feels welcome and included
- **Social impact** – Provide experiences and create an environment that enhances the wellbeing of people
- **Culture, leadership and development** – Provide a positive and engaging workplace for staff and volunteers with opportunities to thrive
- **Safety and wellbeing** – Operate a safe and caring Zoo

## Our Values

**We share our love for wild places and wild life.**

*Ka aroha nui ki ngā wāhi puihi, ki ngā kararehe puihi hoki.*

We are passionate about wild places and wild life. We are continually seeking new knowledge through our research work and sharing what we learn with visitors.

**We are conservation optimists.**  
*Whakanuia te taiao.*

We lead efforts to protect the world’s natural environments and the animals that live in them. We educate people on living more sustainably by showing them how.

**We are all kaitiaki of the Zoo and the environment.**

*He kaitiaki tātou katoa.*

We take our roles in the sustainable management of the Zoo and in the Auckland region’s environment seriously, as we cherish and protect them for future generations.

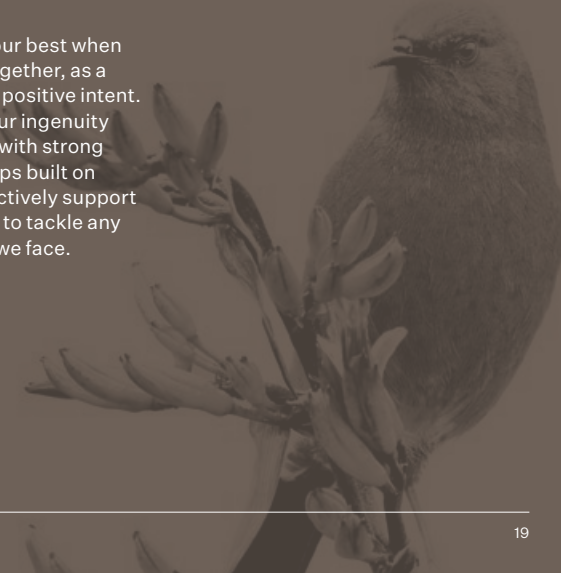
**We stand together.**  
*Ka tū kotahi tātou.*

We are at our best when we work together, as a team, with positive intent. Through our ingenuity combined with strong relationships built on trust, we actively support each other to tackle any challenge we face.

**We welcome visitors as friends.**

*He kaha nō mātou ki te manaaki i ngā manuhiri.*

We welcome visitors to the Zoo as we would our friends. The relationship we build is one of respect for the different reasons visitors have for visiting the Zoo, the role they play in funding the Zoo’s work and earning their respect for the work of the Zoo.



This document is printed on an environmentally responsible paper, that is FSC® certified.