



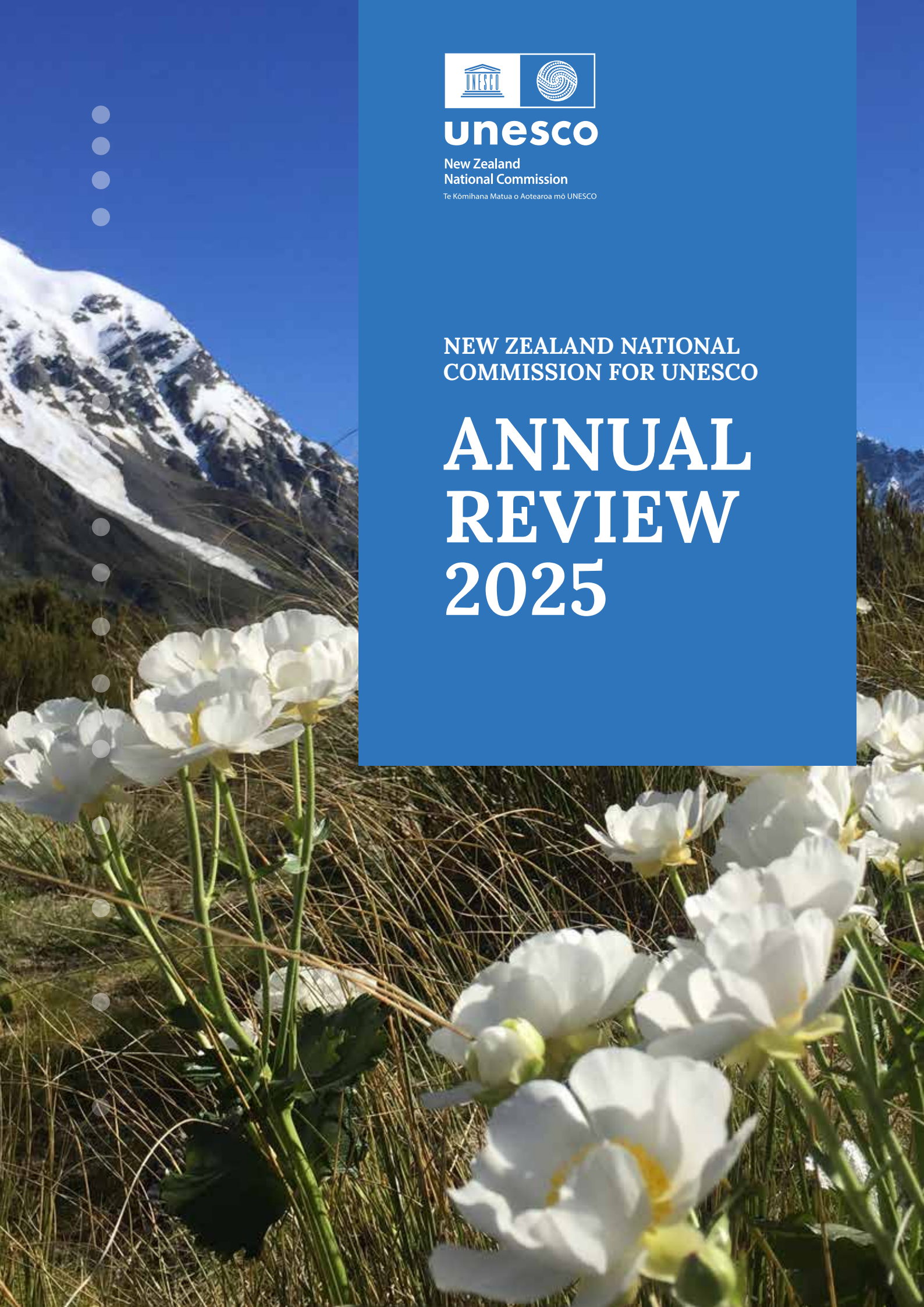
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New Zealand  
National Commission

Te Kōmihana Matua o Aotearoa mō UNESCO

NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL  
COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2025



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# Message from the Chair

## | He kōrero nā te Heamana



As Chair of the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO, I am pleased to present our 2025 Annual Review – a reflection on a year of progress, collaboration, and the continued connection of our mahi in Aotearoa New Zealand with our global UNESCO network.

This year we have continued to champion UNESCO's mandate across Aotearoa New Zealand, supporting initiatives that share knowledge and expertise to improve well-being, tolerance, equity and sustainability. At the same time, we have taken a significant step forward in shaping our future direction, with the development of our new Strategic Plan 2026–2029.

We are focusing our efforts around five key themes that reflect the unique needs and aspirations of our country and its people:

- Climate action
- Indigenous knowledge / Mātauranga Māori
- Literacy and lifelong learning
- Safe digital environments
- Strong social fabrics and cohesion

These themes will guide our work over the next four years, enabling us to amplify UNESCO's mission locally while sharing New Zealand's expertise and leadership on the global stage. They represent our commitment to addressing complex global challenges – from climate resilience and inclusive education to cultural heritage and digital transformation – through a distinctly Aotearoa New Zealand lens.

We continue to invest in the UN Decade of Ocean Science given the critical importance of our marine environment to New Zealand's well-being.

Our focused activities, our ongoing efforts to share world-leading knowledge and build connections, and our work programme of UNESCO designations are the means by which the Commission – and UNESCO – bring value and make a meaningful difference to Aotearoa New Zealand.

2025 was a year with many standout moments reflecting our commitment to these key themes.

One such inspiring highlight was hosting an international education event at Wellington's National Library, where global and national education leaders came together to discuss the future of learning. We welcomed the Minister of Education, Hon Erica Stanford, alongside Manos Antoninis (Director of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Reports), Professor Gail Gillon – our Education Commissioner, and Professor Peter Scott (Commonwealth of Learning), who shared powerful insights on leadership and technology in education.

The event showcased two landmark GEM reports – Leadership in Education and the Pacific regional report Technology in Education – both with strong links to and critically relevant to New Zealand's education journey and our commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4: inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning for all.

With a diverse audience and rich discussion, the event reinforced our role as a connector and catalyst for ideas that drive educational progress. It was a celebration of collaboration, innovation, and the shared vision of ensuring education empowers every learner.

Another highlight and incredibly pivotal moment for contributing New Zealand's voice and knowledge systems to international dialogue took place in Nice, France in June, when we participated in the UN Ocean Conference – a landmark event advancing Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water.

During the week-long Conference we co-hosted a number of very well attended sessions and workshops where we were able to share our knowledge and learnings in this space, based on our unique approach to the UN Decade of Ocean Science which weaves together Western science and Indigenous knowledge systems, particularly mātauranga Māori and Pacific worldviews. This enabled us to showcase how inclusive, culturally grounded solutions can drive global ocean action.

Rounding off our 2025 highlights was our participation in the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference, which took place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan in November. This biennial event is the preeminent governance organ that scrutinises strategic results and sets the strategic direction for UNESCO. I was privileged to act as Head of Delegation once again, and to deliver New Zealand's plenary statement at the UNESCO General Conference. This is an opportunity to share our priorities and demonstrate how, despite our small size, we still contribute significantly on the global stage.

We highlighted our leadership in advancing the UN Decade of Ocean Science through the integration of mātauranga Māori and Pacific knowledge, our commitment to the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, our focus on education for all and encouraged UNESCO to strengthen its support for the Pacific region.

A further point of pride was seeing our Special Advisor Youth, Isaac Morunga, selected to present the Youth Forum's Call to Action to Member States

during the General Conference – ensuring that the voices of youth were heard at the highest level of UNESCO decision-making.

This engagement reinforced New Zealand's reputation as a connector and innovator, ensuring that global decisions reflect values of sustainability, cultural diversity, and collaboration – principles that matter deeply to New Zealand and the wider Pacific.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of our Commissioners, Secretariat, partners, and communities who continue to bring our work to life. Your contributions ensure that UNESCO's values are not only upheld but actively advanced in ways that are relevant, inclusive, and impactful.

The Commission was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of both Russell Marshall and Sir Tumu Te Heuheu Tūkino VIII, each of whom made profound and enduring contributions to the work of the National Commission and UNESCO. We also wish to acknowledge the devastating impact of the fires within Tongariro National Park – the first UNESCO World Heritage site to be recognised for both its natural and cultural significance. Our thoughts are with Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro as they begin the long journey of restoring physical and cultural peace and healing to the land.

This year we said a sad farewell to our Senior Adviser Yana Selyuk, who took up a fantastic job opportunity in Melbourne, but we are pleased to welcome Cherish Peseta to the Secretariat.

As we look ahead to the next strategic period, we do so with renewed purpose and a deep sense of responsibility. We see UNESCO as the vehicle by which we can bring knowledge, evidence and insights to bear, to improve the long-term prospects of New Zealanders. We remain committed to fostering a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world – starting here in New Zealand.

Ngā mihi nui,

**LIZ LONGWORTH**

Chair, New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO



## Te Pae Tawhiti | Vision

Toitū te māramatanga,

Toitū te taiao,

Toitū te ora

Knowledge and understanding are championed for the enduring peace and well-being of people and the planet.

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## Te Pae Tata | Mission

To support a sustainable, healthy and more peaceful future by sharing ideas and deepening connections between the people of Aotearoa New Zealand and with UNESCO globally.

Ki te tautoko i te anamata toitū, hauora, whakaaio hoki mā te tuku whakaaro me te whakahōhonu hononga ki waenga i ngā iwi o Aotearoa, ki UNESCO hoki puta noa i te ao.

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## Te Mana Whakahaere | Mandate

The National Commission ensures the permanent presence of UNESCO in New Zealand. As a country founded on the Treaty of Waitangi and as a foundation member of UNESCO the Commission represents and promotes New Zealand's interests while contributing to the development of UNESCO strategic priorities and programmes. The National Commission contributes to the building of peace, equitable and sustainable development, and intercultural dialogue, paying particular attention to the needs and interests of the Pacific region.

# 2025 Highlights | Ngā Tino Tutukinga

## UN Ocean Conference

A New Zealand delegation travelled to France in June to participate in the 2025 UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) – the largest and most influential ocean conference ever. The conference focused on ‘accelerating action and mobilising all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean’. New Zealand delegates – which included our Natural Sciences Commissioner and Programme Officer – were highly commended by UNOC attendees for their contributions to the Conference and its side-events. Learn more on [page 22](#).



## Our 2026–2029 Strategic Plan

Our updated plan refocuses our efforts around five key themes that best enable us to amplify UNESCO's work in Aotearoa New Zealand. These themes are grounded in the needs of our country and its people, and position us to represent Aotearoa New Zealand meaningfully on the global stage. Through them, we aim to share our knowledge and expertise to help address pressing global challenges. Learn more on [page 12](#).



## A GEM of an event

In March, we hosted a special event at the National Library to celebrate the contribution that UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Reports make to both domestic and global education policy. Educational leaders from around the motu joined us for an engaging programme featuring local and international speakers, including the Minister of Education, the Paris based Director of GEM Reports, our Education Commissioner, and the President of the Commonwealth of Learning. Learn more on [page 21](#).



## General Conference

The 43rd UNESCO General Conference took place in Uzbekistan from 30 October to 13 November 2025, bringing together all UNESCO Member States to set policies, approve budgets, and shape the organisation's global work in education, the sciences, culture, and communication and information. New Zealand was represented by our Chair, Secretary General, Special Advisor Youth and Paris based Permanent Delegate to UNESCO and Policy Advisor. Read our conference highlights on [page 22](#).



## Youth Forum at General Conference

Our Special Advisor Youth, Isaac Morunga, took part in the 2025 UNESCO Youth Forum and was then chosen, along with five others, to represent the 145 youth participants in the presentation of their Call to Action during the General Conference. Isaac's contributions were high profile, highly commended and impactful. Learn more on [page 55](#).





# Our Key Themes

Our work deepens connections between the people of Aotearoa New Zealand and UNESCO globally through the sharing of ideas and building capability for a sustainable, healthy and more peaceful future. The National Commission's work is guided by our themes.

These include the five following thematic areas, as well as our UNESCO designations and programmes (see page 28)

## Climate Action | Te kōkiri take āhuarangi

Climate action means actively taking steps to tackle climate change – both by reducing the causes and the adverse impacts of its effects. Climate action is about building resilient communities, economies, and environments.

Our approach centres on supporting New Zealand and its communities to learn about and utilise sustainable and regenerative practices, as well as build resilience to better address the impacts of climate-related events. Examples of our mahi relating to this theme opposite:



## Indigenous Approaches to Climate Change and Meaningful Youth Engagement

Three of our UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders – Isaac Morunga, Mary Ieremia-Allan, and Tara Shepherd – delivered a global session titled *Indigenous Approaches to Climate Change and Meaningful Youth Engagement* for delegates preparing for the 14th UNESCO Youth Forum in Uzbekistan.

Grounded in kaupapa Māori and Pacific perspectives, the session explored the power of Indigenous knowledge systems, Māori-led initiatives such as Kotahitanga mō te Taiao and Te Awa Tupua, and Pacific resilience strategies. It called for embedding Indigenous knowledge at the heart of climate solutions and elevating rangatahi as decision-makers and leaders.

This event demonstrated how Aotearoa New Zealand's youth are shaping global conversations on climate action, ensuring culturally grounded, intergenerational approaches to one of the world's most urgent challenges.

## Adaptation Futures Conference

The Adaptation Futures Conference – the world's leading conference on climate change adaptation – took place in Christchurch in October. Our Natural Sciences Commissioner, Linda Faulkner, and UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leader Tara Shepherd participated.

Learn more about their Conference experiences on [page 56](#).



## Ngā Kōrero series: Bringing Ocean Literacy Principles to Life

We supported the latest of Ngā Kōrero's Seaweek's popular webinar series, designed to deepen understanding of Ocean Literacy principles and their relevance to Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. One highlight was a session exploring Principle #3: "The Ocean is a major influence on weather and climate." This webinar offered a deep dive into how the ocean shapes daily weather patterns and long-term climate systems, connecting global science with local perspectives.

The session featured our Special Advisor Youth, Isaac Morunga, who brought a youth lens to the discussion, emphasising the importance of engaging young people in ocean and climate

conversations. Through expert insights and interactive dialogue, the series reinforced the critical role of ocean health in addressing climate challenges and inspired participants to consider how knowledge and action can work together for a sustainable future.



# Indigenous Knowledge / Mātauranga Māori Mātauranga taketake / Mātauranga Māori

Indigenous knowledge systems, including Mātauranga Māori, are rich sources of wisdom that connect past, present, and future.

We want to protect and celebrate Aotearoa New Zealand's taonga past, present and future by connecting our unique indigenous culture, natural heritage and communities within New Zealand and internationally. By valuing and sharing this knowledge, we support cultural and linguistic revitalisation, strengthen connections between communities, and enrich our collective response to local and global challenges. Examples of our mahi relating to this theme opposite:

## Te Kura Waka – Connecting Rangatahi with our future navigators

In November our two youth members of our National Decade Committee had the opportunity to interview two members of the Te Kura Waka crew voyaging from Samoa back to New Zealand upon the waka hourua Ngahiraka Mai Tawhiti. The interactions which were captured via a zoom call provided opportunity to discuss commonality around Indigenous knowledge, ocean stewardship, climate change and the importance of keeping cultural traditions such as navigation alive for future generations to learn from.

An edited version of the conversation can be found on our website's Knowledge Hub.



## United Nations Ocean Conference – Indigenous-led Dialogue

The UN Ocean Conference, which was attended by a New Zealand delegation including our Natural Sciences Commissioner Linda Faulkner and Silke Bieda from the Secretariat, is a key example of the cross-cutting nature of our work. Here not only were we able to champion New Zealand's work in Ocean Science, but we were able to showcase our leadership in, and the importance of, incorporating Indigenous knowledge into global ocean governance.

Our delegation emphasised the importance of mātauranga Māori and Pacific worldviews in shaping sustainable ocean solutions, particularly in the context of two breakout sessions: Navigating Blue Futures-Blending Indigenous Wisdom with Nature-based Finance to Secure Protection, Livelihoods and Culture and Indigenous-led Dialogue.

Indigenous-led Dialogue, which we led and facilitated, was a Decade-organised dialogue session for Indigenous delegates hosted aboard the German research vessel RV METEOR. Limited to 50 participants, the session provided an intimate space for discussion and collaboration

on challenges and opportunities for Indigenous knowledge and peoples within the Ocean Decade. Co-hosted with Katy Soapi (SPC) and Ken Paul (First Nations Canada), the dialogue focused on priorities for the remaining five years of the Decade and produced recommendations for the UNESCO-IOC Decade Coordination Unit to strengthen Indigenous participation and leadership.



## Safe Digital Environments | Ngā taiao matihiko e haumarū ana

Safe digital environments are spaces where individuals and communities can interact freely, openly, and safely online.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, this matters because our communities are diverse, and we value fairness and inclusion. Keeping digital spaces safe helps all New Zealanders confidently take part in society, express themselves openly, and contribute fully to our democracy.



### Passing on key learnings through our Knowledge Hub

Our Knowledge Hub features a number of key resources aligning with this theme including: UNESCO AI Competency Frameworks for Students and Teachers; UNESCO GEM 2024 Pacific Report – Technology in Education; Recommendation on the Ethics of AI; and Access to Information – A guarantee of inclusion and disability rights, among others.

## Strong Social Fabrics and Cohesion | Ngā papanga hono hapori e kaha ana me te noho tahitanga

Communities thrive when built on trust, inclusivity, and mutual understanding.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, prioritising social cohesion means nurturing respect across cultures, honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and creating spaces where everyone can feel valued and connected in ways that reflect their own identity, while also building and maintaining shared spaces that hold us together as a diverse society. Find out how our mahi supports this theme.



## 2025 Race Unity Hui and Speech Final

The 25th annual Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui brought together more than 150 rangatahi from across Aotearoa New Zealand to share powerful perspectives on race relations under the theme *Te Moana Nui o te Kanorau* – The Great Ocean of Diversity. Regional heats culminated in a national hui and finals held at Ngā Kete Wānanga Marae, Manukau Institute of Technology, where Jordyn Joy Pillay was named the national winner.

We continued our long-standing support for this initiative, which aligns with our kaupapa as it provides a vital platform for youth voices on unity and inclusion. UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders Wesley Tanuvasa (facilitator) and Madiha Ali and Isaac Morunga (judges) supported this year's kaupapa reinforcing our commitment to empowering young leaders to shape a more equitable and harmonious future.



## Strong Social Sciences

In 2025 we developed and published an article – which can be found on our Knowledge Hub – reflecting the vital role of social and human sciences in building inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies.

It illustrates how social sciences intersect with UNESCO's mandate and our key themes while drawing on diverse ways of knowing, including mātauranga Māori and Pacific perspectives. By combining evidence-based research with

human experience, social sciences enable better decisions, foster innovation, and create conditions for societies to thrive sustainably and equitably. This work reminds us that knowledge is not just an economic driver but a foundation for justice, creativity, and connection.

Our Strong Social Sciences article can be found here: <https://unesco.org.nz/knowledge-hub/the-importance-of-strong-social-sciences>

## Literacy and Lifelong Learning | Te reo matatini me te ako taumano

Literacy and lifelong learning are foundational elements in UNESCO's mission to promote inclusive, equitable quality education and learning opportunities for all.

In New Zealand, focusing on literacy and lifelong learning ensures that everyone can fully participate in society, access opportunities, and contribute positively to their communities. Find out how our mahi supports this theme.



## A GEM of an event

In March, we hosted a landmark event at Wellington's National Library celebrating the contribution of UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Reports to education policy in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Pacific and worldwide.

Two reports with strong relevance to Aotearoa New Zealand were showcased: the *2024 GEM Report: Leadership in Education* and the *Pacific Regional Report: Technology in Education – A Tool on Whose Terms?* Both reports support progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensuring inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning for all. The event brought together a diverse audience and reinforced our commitment to evidence-based policy and global collaboration in education.

The event featured:

- Hon Erica Stanford (Minister of Education) – who laid out her aspirations for New Zealand's education system
- Manos Antoninis (Paris-based Director of GEM Reports) – who provided an overview of

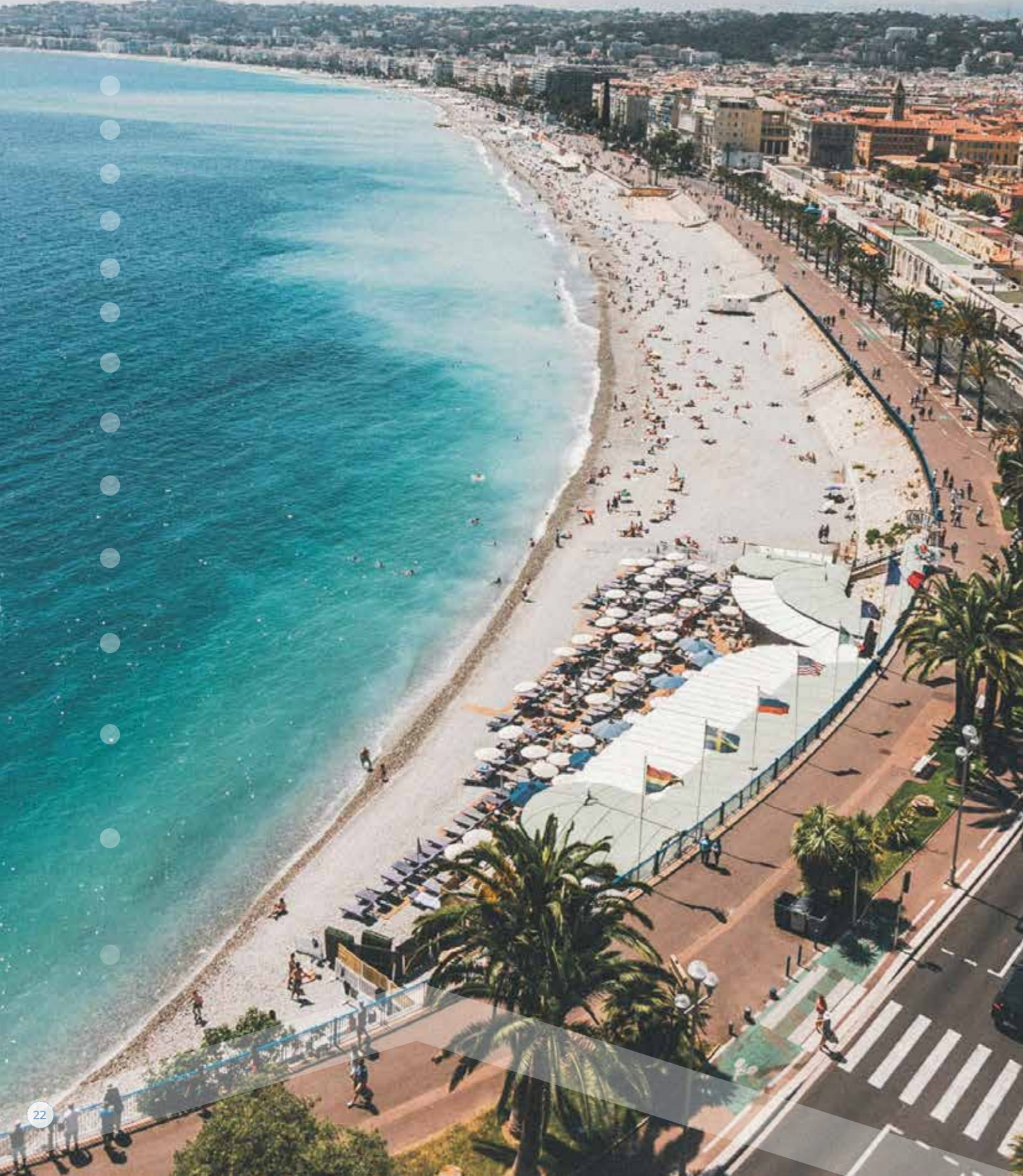


the key insights that the latest GEM reports provide in both a global and regional context.

- Professor Gail Gillon (Education Commissioner) – who spoke to the challenges facing educators that the reports examined, and
- Professor Peter Scott (President of the Commonwealth of Learning) – who focused on the Pacific report (as joint publisher) outlining how the report demonstrated what is working and what needs more attention, and how the work within the report can be a model for others.

A recording of the event can be found here: <https://unesco.org.nz/knowledge-hub/watch-gem-report-event>

## Special Feature: UN Ocean Conference



## UN Ocean Conference

In June 2025 a New Zealand delegation travelled to Nice, France to take part in the 3rd UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) – including our Natural Sciences Commissioner, Linda Faulkner and Silke Bieda from our Secretariat.

Other New Zealand delegates included representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Karen Scott from Canterbury University; Lisa Tumahai from the Hinemoana Halo Ocean Fund; Schannel van Dijken from Conservation International Aotearoa and Dr Penelope Ridings, New Zealand's member of the International Law Commission.

The National Commission provided funding support for the Yellow Eyed Penguin Trust to participate through our Activity Grant fund.

UNOC3 was co-organised by Costa Rica and France and called for urgent action to support the implementation of SDG14 and had the overarching theme: "Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean".

It drew high attendance numbers with over 15,000 participants from 175 UN Member States, including 2,000 scientists, 60 heads of states and 190 ministers. The conference comprised 10 Plenary sessions, 10 Ocean Action Panels and a plethora of side events.





## Our Highlights

### **Global National Decade Committees Meeting:**

Alongside Germany and Brazil we co-organised the second in-person meeting of the global National Decade Committees (NDCs) aboard the German research vessel RV METEOR. This strategic workshop brought together NDC representatives from around the world to review progress of the first half of the UN Ocean Decade and shape a collective vision for the next five years. Through strategic pitches and breakout sessions, participants shaped the NDC Action Plan 2025–2027, focusing on regional cooperation, political engagement, and preparation for key milestones such as the 2027 Ocean Decade Conference. The meeting strengthened partnerships and opened new opportunities, including an invitation for New Zealand to present its unique Ocean Decade approach at a conference in Portugal in December 2025.

### **Ocean Decade Forum:**

The Ocean Decade Forum, organised by IOC-UNESCO, reflected on achievements and charted the path ahead for the UN Ocean Decade. Linda represented the New Zealand National Decade Committee Kāhui Manaaki Tangaroa on a global panel, highlighting our unique approach to ocean science – blending mātauranga Māori and Pacific knowledge systems, linking the Ocean Decade with the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, and drawing on lessons from the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge to strengthen science-to-policy transfer approaches. The Forum also spotlighted youth inclusion through Heirs to Our Ocean’s powerful presentation.

**Global Youth Manifesto Presentation:** Citizens of the Ocean, a youth-led world forum funded by the European Commission, convened 60 young “Ocean Citizens” from five continents at Nausicaá,

France, in March 2025. The goal: to create a platform for collaboration and develop a Manifesto for the Ocean. Two inspiring young leaders from New Zealand were selected to join the global delegation and attend UNOC3 where they presented the manifesto – a bold declaration of priorities and proposed solutions that youth believe should guide ocean policies – calling for urgent action to protect and sustainably use our oceans.

New Zealander Veronica Rotman delivered both the opening and closing remarks, earning praise from the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean, who commended “the young woman from New Zealand” for her outstanding speech.

**Indigenous-led Dialogue:** Linda led and facilitated

this Decade organised dialogue session for indigenous delegates attending UNOC3. The event was hosted on the German research vessel, RV METEOR, so was limited to 50 participants, providing a good-sized group for discussion and workshopping. The event was co-hosted by Katy Soapi (SPC) and Ken Paul (First Nations Canada) and focussed on discussing some of the challenges and opportunities for indigenous knowledge and peoples associated with the Ocean Decade. A key focus was also the remaining five years of the Decade with the meeting developing a set of recommendations to the Decade Coordination Unit around priorities and proposed initiatives to better support indigenous participation and leadership in the Decade.



## Key outcomes

170 nations adopted the landmark declaration *Our Ocean, Our Future: United for Urgent Action*. This commitment sets out concrete steps to conserve and sustainably use the ocean – expanding marine protected areas, decarbonising maritime transport, tackling marine pollution, and mobilising finance for vulnerable coastal and island nations.

Following the conference, the *Nice Commitments for the Ocean* were released, presenting a strategic vision for sustainable ocean governance. These commitments identify priority actions such as scaling up ocean-based climate solutions, protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030, ending harmful subsidies, financing ocean action, and

ensuring inclusive approaches that empower all communities. Together, these agreements signal a decisive global shift toward safeguarding the ocean for future generation.

New Zealand played a key role in advancing these commitments, registering six new Voluntary National Contributions, championing Indigenous knowledge integration, and committing over \$52 million to strengthen ocean governance and science across the Pacific.

Find out more here: <https://unesco.org.nz/knowledge-hub/un-ocean-conference-takeaways-and-learnings>

## New Zealand National Decade Committee

The Aotearoa New Zealand National Decade Committee plays a central role in supporting Aotearoa's contribution to the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The Committee coordinates domestic activities, connects national initiatives with international Decade efforts, and actively engages stakeholders across science, policy, communities, and industry.

Established in October 2020 as the New Zealand Reference Group on the Decade of Ocean Science, the Committee was reconstituted and formally registered with the Decade in July 2021. Its mission is to embrace and empower multiple knowledges, disciplines, and sectors through an ocean kinship approach, supported by three core goals: **Mōhiotanga** (raising awareness), **Mātauranga**

(showcasing knowledge), and **Hononga** (promoting connections).

The Committee brings together a multidisciplinary group of members, ranging from youth to experienced leader, including scientists, Indigenous knowledge holders, government representatives, NGOs, and early career professionals.

At the heart of its work is a commitment to centring Indigenous and local knowledge. Ocean science in Aotearoa is enriched by diverse knowledge systems, especially the values and worldviews of Māori and Pacific peoples. The Committee weaves these perspectives into a multidisciplinary and culturally grounded contribution to the Decade.



## Why are Oceans important to our National Commission – summarised from the words of our Natural Sciences Commissioner, Linda Faulkner

Aotearoa New Zealand sits within the world's largest and oldest ocean, and our marine environment is exceptionally rich and diverse. Our Exclusive Economic Zone spans 4.2 million square kilometres – about 15 times our land area – and holds one of the highest proportions of endemic marine species on Earth. Scientific estimates suggest that around 80% of our indigenous biodiversity is found in the ocean, including coral species found nowhere else globally. These ecosystems underpin not only our natural heritage but also our climate, biodiversity, economy and well-being.

With over 15,000 kilometres of coastline and most New Zealanders living close to the sea, the ocean is central to our identity and daily life. Our relationship with Te Moananui a Kiwa reflects generations of navigation, exploration and stewardship by Māori and Pacific peoples, forming deep cultural, social and economic connections. Today, Aotearoa's marine economy – spanning customary, community and commercial activity – contributes more than \$3.8 billion annually, reinforcing the ocean's enduring importance.

This deep connection is why Aotearoa New Zealand plays an active role in the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Through the National Commission for UNESCO, we work to bring global knowledge, expertise and collaboration home, while sharing Aotearoa's own unique strengths with the world. The Decade provides vital opportunities to elevate our science, mātauranga Māori, and regional perspectives while accessing global research, partnerships and innovation to address the urgent challenges facing our oceans.

Those challenges are significant. Aotearoa's marine and coastal areas are warming 34% faster than the global average, intensifying marine heatwaves and altering ecosystems. Ocean acidity, deoxygenation and shifts in large scale circulation patterns are increasingly evident, with sea levels rising faster in recent decades and affecting communities and coasts. These pressures make the Decade's collaborative approach – combining scientific discovery with Indigenous knowledge – essential to creating sustainable, resilient ocean futures for Aotearoa and the Pacific.



# Our Programmes

## Tāone Auaha | Creative Cities

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network is made up of 350 cities around the world driven by an aim to support an international dialogue on cities that are resilient, inclusive and sustainable. In 2025, the international network covered eight creative fields: Crafts and Folk Art, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Architecture, Literature and Music. The National Commission is proud to share Aotearoa New Zealand's four Creative Cities' 2025 highlights.



## A Residency Connects Ōtepoti and Durban Cities of Literature

In October Dunedin welcomed poet Sihle Ntuli from Durban UNESCO City of Literature as the 2025 Caselberg Trust Margaret Egan Cities of Literature Writers Resident. Sihle's application was selected from 79 submissions representing 28 Cities of Literature worldwide.

During six weeks at the Caselberg House in Whakaohorahi Broad Bay, Sihle immersed himself in Ōtepoti's creative life and, to the delight of the community, wrote poems inspired by his time here. His Residency was timed to coincide with the Dunedin Writers & Readers Festival, where he appeared in two popular Hone Tuwhare Trust Poetry Series events. Sihle also featured on two OAR FM podcasts, which included readings from his latest highly regarded collection.

Dunedin is grateful to the Caselberg Trust and to the late Margaret Egan, whose generous bequest to the Trust makes this Residency possible.

The annual Residency alternates between international writers and writers from Aotearoa New Zealand.



Sihle Ntuli, 2025 Caselberg Trust Margaret Egan Cities of Literature Writers Resident. Photo by OAR FM

## Writing for Wellness: Creativity, Community, and Care

The Writing for Wellness workshops ran from May to July 2025 – a vibrant and affirming offering of words and well-being. Created through a collaboration between WellSouth Primary Health Network and Ōtepoti UNESCO City of Literature, the series of workshops offered a nurturing space where writing became a tool for reflection, resilience, and connection.

Across six Thursday evenings, City of Literature South D Poet Lorikeet Jenny Powell joined WellSouth Health Improvement Practitioners Sarah Redfearn and Rohana Weaver to guide participants in exploring well-being through creative writing. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants describing writing as both a personal outlet and a bridge to community. By the



City of Literature South D Poet Lorikeet Jenny Powell and workshop participants during a Writing for Wellness session. Photo by Rohana Weaver

final session, many planned to keep meeting and writing together.

"I was delighted to be part of this," said Jenny. "We all learned from each other — it was an honour to combine creativity and well-being so meaningfully."

## Poetry Pen Pals: Ōtepoti and Québec City Exchange Handwritten Poems

Ōtepoti UNESCO City of Literature is delighted to collaborate with Québec City UNESCO City of Literature's Morrin Centre on the ongoing Poetry Pen Pals project. This inspiring international exchange connects the two cities through the sharing of handwritten poems by emerging and established poets.

Poems created in Québec City especially for Ōtepoti are now proudly displayed in the City of Literature space at Dunedin City Library, adding a new international layer to the shelves of wonderful local titles.

In turn, the Morrin Centre is exhibiting Ōtepoti's contributions from free City of Literature workshops, including the South Dunedin SuperGrans' wish poems, created in 2024 under the guidance of City of Literature South D Poet Lorikeet Jenny Powell. Participants in the various

popular 2025 workshops also shared their own handwritten poems — including a special poem by 11-year-old poet Ajax Banstola celebrating Everest Day.



Dunedin City Library City of Literature display area showcasing poems from Québec City. Photo by Jill Bowie

## Poetry Scrum: “Bodies built for strength, for power, for glory”

Ōtepoti UNESCO City of Literature participated in Exeter UNESCO City of Literature's acknowledgement of its host city role for the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup. To celebrate, Exeter devised an inspiring international initiative – the Poetry Scrum.

The project brought together women poets from UNESCO Cities of Literature around the world to share new work exploring themes of female empowerment, bodies in movement, and the spirit of sport. The result was a dynamic celebration of women's sport, creativity, and connection across cultures.

During the Rugby World Cup, Exeter UNESCO City of Literature shared the poem videos from the participating cities. Ōtepoti UNESCO City of Literature was proud to be part of this global exchange through the contribution of local poet



Isla's poem being shown to the people of Exeter in the Rugby World Cup fanzone. Photo by Exeter UNESCO City of Literature

Isla Thomas, whose powerful poem 'Harbour Girls' was featured on screen in the Poetry Scrum series throughout the championship. Watch Isla read her poem [here](#)



## Whanganui UNESCO City of Design

### Whanganui X Dundee: Textile Legacies

Textile Legacies is a residency programme that connects indigenous and ancestral textile practices between Whanganui, New Zealand and Dundee, Scotland to foster meaningful cultural and creative exchange. The project initiates a new connection between two UNESCO Cities of Design, supporting the development of contemporary textile design specialists through a reciprocal international residency.

Whanganui x Dundee: Textile Legacies enables a textile design specialist from Whanganui to undertake a month-long residency in Dundee, and a Dundee-based specialist to undertake a reciprocal residency in Whanganui.

The project recognises the deep-rooted history of textile production in both cities, and the

significance of textiles in expressing and sustaining ancestral and familial connections. It also acknowledges the vital role that the reclamation of traditional textile practices plays in cultural revitalisation in both Aotearoa New Zealand and Scotland.



### He Kai Kei Akū Runga Design Your Own Business

This grassroots programme guides participants through business planning, regulatory compliance, marketing, and financial literacy, all supported by experienced coaches, practical resources, and 1:1 mentorship.

An additional half-day product design lab follows on for relevant participants. Participants have the opportunity to test ideas, explore production pathways, and move their concepts closer to market.



### Whanganui City of Design Showreel

As a proud UNESCO Creative City of Design, Whanganui has produced a stunning showreel that celebrates the city's unique design culture and creative spirit. Crafted by Create Now – a production company from Wellington UNESCO City of Film – the showreel beautifully captures how design is woven into the very fabric of Whanganui's identity.

Watch the showreel here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teXxmr3YMLo>

## Indigenous Animation Exchange with Ireland

As part of an Indigenous Animation Exchange, Wellington UNESCO Creative City of Film supported animators **Seth Parata Stewart** (Wellington, New Zealand) and **Siobhán Ní Thuairisg** (Galway, Ireland) to undertake residencies, attend festivals, and showcase work in Te Reo Māori and Irish Gaelic to global audiences.

The Indigenous Animation Exchange is a unique initiative born out of a shared vision to foster cross-cultural exchanges through animation, creating opportunities for indigenous storytellers and animators from different backgrounds to connect, learn, and develop authentic indigenous content



*"I got to see all these young people who were just learning about their craft and learning how to work in animation who were also so passionate about their native language. This was something I had never ever seen in my life before. All I knew was that te reo Māori had less native speakers. All these young people so passionate about their language, speaking it daily, and creating through this language. This can happen. This is real."*

- Siobhán Ní Thuairisg

*"One of the things I saw when you go to the studios that are making the shows that are rich with Irish culture and their mythology is how authentic it is. That's what people like to learn about. It's about making authentic stories."*

- Seth Parata Stewart

## Bringing New Zealand to the Annecy Film Festival and Market

In collaboration with the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC), Wellington UNESCO Creative City of Film helped re-establish New Zealand's presence at the Annecy Film Festival and Market for the first time since 2016, marking the 40th anniversary of MIFA (Market) with a national booth promoting New Zealand as a premier destination for animation, VFX, and co-production.

The Indigenous Animation Showcase at the festival was a landmark celebration of cross-cultural collaboration in animation. As part of the event, Wellington Creative City of Film brought together exchange representatives to share their experience, offering valuable insights into the creative and cultural connections forged through the indigenous animation exchange and the potential for indigenous-led storytelling in global animation markets.

Wellington Creative City of Film also supported four Wellington-based creatives to attend the festival. These creatives from diverse and underrepresented communities each brought a unique perspective to the festival and found the experience deeply beneficial to their professional development, returning to New Zealand with new insights and knowledge to motivate, inspire, and share with their peers and communities.



*"I return to Aotearoa with a fire in my belly, new tools in my kete, and a stronger belief in myself as a Māori animator with something unique to share with the world."*

- Moretekorohunga Lloyd, Māori Animator & Illustrator

*"Annecy was an incredible opportunity not only to develop and refine my own creative taste, but also to gain a more holistic understanding of the filmmaking process—and I'm excited to bring that insight back to my community in Wellington, both as a filmmaker and as an educator."*

- Haojun Huang, young Chinese Animation Designer & Art Director

*"Attending Annecy was an experience like no other. I came away inspired and motivated to continue developing local stories in the animation space."*

- Francesca Carney, female Animation Producer

## Inspiring young filmmakers at Māoriland Film Festival

Wellington UNESCO Creative City of Film supported the next generation of filmmakers, as well as those on the Indigenous Animation Exchange, to attend the Māoriland Film Festival and gain valuable insights into authentic, cultural storytelling and filmmaking.

A highlight of the Festival was the pōwhiri which underscored the importance of cultural respect, connection, and collaboration in the global animation community. The event facilitated a deeper understanding of the cultural values that guide the Māoriland Film Festival and provided an opportunity to reflect on the shared importance of preserving cultural identities.

The co-production panel at Māoriland brought together industry professionals to explore how co-productions between different countries and cultures can foster innovation and diversity. **Alan Duggan** (Galway City of Film Director) shared his insights into the challenges and opportunities within co-production projects. His participation highlighted the importance of international partnerships and how they can contribute to the growth of unique, culturally diverse content.



### Auckland UNESCO City of Music

## Farewell Mark

Mark Roach concluded his time with Auckland UNESCO City of Music this year, having been the driving force behind Auckland's successful bid to become a UNESCO City of Music – a vision he championed from its very inception. Throughout his tenure, Mark demonstrated unwavering commitment not only to the power and potential of music but also to the broader vision of a creative city. His international leadership significantly enhanced the Creative Cities Network, fostering deeper collaboration and elevating its global impact. His passion for

fostering cultural vibrancy and supporting artists was instrumental in strengthening Auckland's identity as a global music hub.

*"In a way, I feel like music is part of everything I touch. It's there. You know every time I see a story about something, whether it's disaster relief or roads or building, I think 'Gosh, music would be so great there', you know 'Music could help that.' I'm not saying it would be the answer to everything, but it would make a huge difference to the outcome."*

– **Mark Roach, former New Zealand Creative City of Music Lead (and Musician).**

## EQUALISER Global Launch

In April the gender equality project Equaliser was relaunched by UNESCO Cities of Music. The project has been redeveloped to allow for maximum participation by music communities within the global UNESCO Creative Cities of Music network.

Equaliser brings together participants from the music sector to collaborate, share knowledge, inspire and empower one another; increase professional development opportunities, and foster a safe and inclusive culture for the global music community. Equaliser has been successfully run in Aotearoa New Zealand by Auckland City of Music for several years. Auckland Creative City of Music was a driving force behind the Equaliser relaunch.

Equaliser is a Cities of Music response to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and aims to work towards outcomes in a globally cooperative manner to further reiterate the value and worth of belonging to an intercity network such as this.

Find out more at [www.equaliserglobal.com](http://www.equaliserglobal.com)



## UNESCO Creative Cities of Music Subnetwork Annual Meeting

Auckland City of Music Focal Point, Mark Roach, attended the UNESCO Creative Cities of Music Subnetwork Annual Meeting in Pesaro, Italy in April.

Pesaro, a City of Music since 2017, is located in the northeast of the country and was named the Italian Capital of Culture in 2024. Around 30 cities were represented at the three-day meeting to discuss inter-city dialogue and collaborations, share experiences and knowledge, and experience the culture and music of the host city. The meeting was also used to inform members of the new pan-network project, Equaliser. The National Commission supported Mark to attend the Creatives Cities of Music Subnetwork Annual Meeting.



# UNESCO Chairs Programme

Launched in 1992, the UNESCO Chairs Programme promotes international inter-university cooperation and networking to enhance institutional capacities through knowledge sharing and collaborative work.



Aotearoa New Zealand has four Chairs – UNESCO Chair on Dance and Social Inclusion; UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Livelihoods; UNESCO Chair on Open Educational Resources (OER); and the UNESCO Chair in Interreligious Understanding and Relations in New Zealand and the Pacific. We capture highlights from two of our Chairs below.

## Co-chairs Professors Ralph Buck and Nicholas Rowe

### Promoting Knowledge Production and Exchange:

The Chairs gave visiting lectures and workshops across the globe including in Canberra, Melbourne, Beijing, Shanghai, Palermo, Bratislava, Auckland, Port Moresby, Chengdu, Taipei, Hong Kong, Chemnitz, Changchun and Singapore. Professor Rowe gave a Tedx talk on 'Can dancing prepare democracy for dystopia' which can be viewed here – <https://www.nord.no/en/events/research/tedx-bodo>

They created a *Masters in Creative Arts Therapy, Dance Studies* University of Auckland, fostering wellness and quality education in line with UNESCO SDG 4: Quality Education.

### Fostering Collaboration Locally and Globally:

Professor Rowe became a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand advocating for the

need to accelerate cultural transformation for climate change.

The Chairs were part of an international partnership which launched INTRACOMP in 2025. INTRACOMP is redefining arts education and cultural engagement by embedding Intercultural and Transcultural Competence (ITC) into learning, policy, and digital innovation. It is a global project funded through Horizon Europe (European Union) that identifies and activates local action.

They created the Pacific Arts symposium: *He Toka tu moana, he akinga nan ga tai* in partnership with Auckland Museum. The day-long event raised awareness of indigenous Pacific cultures. Students facilitated key aspects of the event and built skills and awareness in critical thinking, cultural diversity and social cohesion across the Pacific.



The Chairs partnered with Pacific Dance New Zealand in presenting emerging artists choreography in the 2025 Pacific Dance Festival. As well as Devadlo Bes Demova in Slovakia, providing arts workshops for disabled and homeless people.

**Engaging with UNESCO initiatives and programmes:** The Chairs worked with Dance and the Child International to develop the Dance and the Child International Ljubljana Declaration advocating for the implementation of the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education.

They attended the UNESCO Paris conference on AI and the Future of Education and the

UNESCO Mondiacult 2025 International Webinar: *The Impact and Effectiveness of Arts and Culture Education.*

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## UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Livelihoods

Clean SLATE, a Massey University initiative co-led by Professor Stuart Carr to develop the world's first Sustainable Livelihoods Index (SL-I) and build global partnerships for sustainable, decent work has gained global endorsement in 2025.

In 2025 Professor Carr travelled to Paris to meet UNESCO senior officials and then to Geneva to present his research to the UN International Labour Organisation's Research on Decent Work Conference.

The Paris visit, hosted by UNESCO's University Twinning and Networking Chair Programme, resulted in renewed support for the Clean SLATE initiative, including international endorsement for the SL-I, which has since been published in the journal [Sustainability](#).

"The visit confirmed UNESCO's backing of Clean SLATE and opened the door for Massey to co-host a 24-hour global webinar showcasing youth voices on a number of topics," Professor Carr says.



# Ngā Puna Mahara o te Ao | Memory of the World

UNESCO believes that the world's documentary heritage belongs to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and be permanently accessible to all. Its Memory of the World programme aims to recognise significant documentary heritage in a similar fashion to the way UNESCO's World Heritage Convention and World Heritage List recognises significant natural and cultural sites. The National Commission established New Zealand's programme in 2010 – its Register now includes 56 inscriptions.



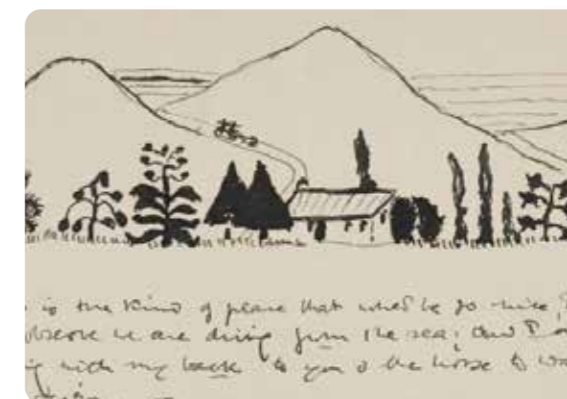
## Katherine Mansfield Collections added to International Register

The global significance and value of Katherine Mansfield's literary and personal papers were recognised with a listing on UNESCO's International Memory of the World Register in May 2025.

This inscription of the Mansfield Collections, which are held at the Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library in Wellington, elevates the status of the documentary heritage collection, placing it alongside other internationally recognised landmarks in history.

Katherine Mansfield (the pseudonym of Kathleen Beauchamp, 1888 –1923) is New Zealand's most celebrated writer internationally, and one of the world's foremost modernist writers, best known for her short stories and transformation of the genre.

The Katherine Mansfield papers represent the largest and most significant collection of Mansfield material in the world. The Mansfield Collections include original correspondence, notebooks and



journals, and personal belongings, including her typewriter. They document the writer's artistic preoccupations, development, and methods, as well as her complex personal life.

Before this prestigious addition, the Katherine Mansfield literary and personal papers were inscribed on the New Zealand UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2016 (#17).

## East Coast photograph collection added to New Zealand Memory of the World Register

The William Fitzgerald Crawford photographic collection at Tairawhiti Museum in Gisborne was recognised on New Zealand's UNESCO Memory of the World Register in September 2025. It is the first entry from Gisborne and the East Coast region.

The extensive collection of 5,000 glass plate negatives provides an exceptional record of the development of early Gisborne over four decades between 1874 and 1912.

Jane Wild, Chair of the UNESCO Memory of the World Trust said:

*"The photographs provide a remarkable record of place, people at work and at play. Preserving this unique collection and digitising the images to share the story of Gisborne and its region is a large and vital commitment to our local and national stories."*



# Taiao Ahurei Huriao | UNESCO Global Geoparks

Geoparks are geographical areas with geology of outstanding value. Geoparks are community owned and open to everyone. They take a community-led approach to protecting and promoting the very best of our geology.

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.

In 2023 Waitaki Whitestone Geopark was officially endorsed as Aotearoa New Zealand's first UNESCO accredited Global Geopark recognising its outstanding geological and cultural heritage and its commitment to sustainable development, education, and community engagement.

Learn more about Waitaki Whitestone Global Geopark and its 2025 highlights opposite:

## Global Knowledge Exchange Strengthens Waitaki Whitestone Geopark

In May, two members of the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark team participated in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Mentorship and Knowledge Exchange Programme. This initiative provides geoparks with a transformative learning experience to enhance expertise and support the ongoing development of geoparks worldwide.

General Manager Lynley Browne and Geoscientist Sasha Morriss visited geoparks in England, Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Spain. The selected geoparks offered relevant initiatives that align

with opportunities for New Zealand, providing valuable insights into geoconservation, education, sustainable tourism, heritage, and gastronomy.

The programme strengthened connections with the global UNESCO Geopark community and deepened understanding of the vision and goals of the Global Geopark Programme.

The team came back with fresh ideas, practical learnings, and a strong network of contacts that will help drive the future of Waitaki Whitestone Geopark.

## International Geopark Engagement at International Course

The National Commission supported the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark General Manager to attend the 2025 International Course on UNESCO Global Geoparks, held at Lesvos Island Geopark in Greece.

The course explored how UNESCO Global Geoparks create meaningful impacts for local communities and society, while addressing key conceptual frameworks. The programme featured expert-led lectures, case studies, and field visits within the well-established Lesvos Island Geopark.

"This was an exceptional opportunity to engage with the Global Geoparks Network leadership and fellow managers. The insights gained will directly inform and strengthen initiatives within the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark," said Lynley Browne, General Manager.

## Penguin Exhibition Upgrade Strengthens Geopark Storytelling

In 2025, Ōamaru Penguins completed a major exhibition upgrade, enhancing how visitors learn about the organisation's scientific and conservation work. As part of this redevelopment, the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark collaborated with the exhibition team to integrate new material on ancient penguins into large entrance graphics and an immersive short film.

Linking modern penguins with their prehistoric ancestors – species for which the geopark is internationally recognised – creates a clearer, more cohesive visitor story.

This connection also strengthens alignment with the Vanished World Museum, where upcoming updates will place greater emphasis on ancient penguin discoveries from across the geopark.

A prominently placed Geopark branded interactive digital Storymapp display in the ticketing and retail area further boosts visibility and public understanding of the geopark's unique geological and paleontological heritage.



# World Heritage

World Heritage Sites are places recognised by UNESCO as having “outstanding universal value”. They are either natural or cultural sites, or a combination of both, and are deemed significant for their historical, artistic, or scientific importance. New Zealand was the first country to inscribe a dual natural and cultural site.

Aotearoa New Zealand currently has three World Heritage sites – Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand, Tongariro National Park, and the New Zealand Sub-Antarctic Islands. Te Wāhipounamu and Tongariro were listed in 1990, while the Sub-Antarctic Islands were added in 1998.



## Aotearoa New Zealand’s World Heritage Tentative List applications open

To be nominated for World Heritage status, a site must be on Aotearoa New Zealand’s Tentative List – currently there are eight sites on this list.

On behalf of the New Zealand Government, the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) is currently leading the process to update Aotearoa New Zealand’s Tentative List of potential World Heritage sites.

For a site to be placed on the Tentative List, it needs to have strong potential to be listed as a World Heritage site by meeting the UNESCO World Heritage criteria.

Sites are considered from a global perspective, which means a site of local or national importance will not necessarily be inscribed on the World Heritage List.

## Tongariro Tragedy

The National Commission acknowledges the devastation caused by the horrendous fires that travelled through the Tongariro National Park World Heritage Area.

Tongariro is one of Aotearoa’s most treasured places – recognised globally for its dual natural and cultural significance and revered by tangata whenua as a landscape of immense ancestral and spiritual importance.

Two major fires – on 8 November and 8 December 2025 – burnt through approximately 3,300 hectares of precious sub alpine and alpine ecosystems, wetlands, frost flats and pockets of kaikawaka forest. While only limited infrastructure was affected, the impact on biodiversity has been significant.

In response, Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro placed a Rāhui Whakaora over the affected area. This rāhui marks the beginning of Maunga Ora (well-being of the mountain), a long term programme led by Ngāti Hikairo and supported



by the Department of Conservation, focused on the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of Tongariro.

Early signs of natural regeneration are visible as the landscape transitions from charred black to emerging green. Guided by Ngāti Hikairo values and tikanga, the ongoing recovery effort is grounded in respect, partnership between people and place and a shared commitment to protecting the integrity of this extraordinary World Heritage site.

## Bringing our Designations together

Once a year, the National Commission brings together all our UNESCO designations for an in person hui, creating a valuable opportunity to share achievements, discuss challenges and strengthen collaboration across our network. The hui also helps to highlight how each designation connects with the others and how, together, they contribute to UNESCO’s mandate.

Gathering as a full group builds a strong sense of shared purpose, deepens relationships, and showcases the energy and momentum driving UNESCO related work across the country.



# Projects we supported | Ngā kaupapa i tautokona e mātou

The National Commission funds projects, events, programmes and initiatives with a strong connection to our mission to support a sustainable, healthy and more peaceful future by sharing ideas and deepening connections between the people of Aotearoa New Zealand and with UNESCO globally.

In 2025, we supported more than 17 projects through our Activity Grants fund, including the following events and initiatives:



## Heal the Hauraki

Heal the Hauraki is an environmental three-part docuseries and media campaign highlighting solutions to major environmental issues with a focus on the Hauraki Gulf, Auckland. The project raises awareness of the significant ecological issues we face in and around the Hauraki Gulf while sharing stories of hope and inspiration. The docuseries shares the stories, experiences

and ethos of experts and leaders in diverse fields (including our Culture Commissioner, Dr Dan Hikuroa) to provide insight and inspiration to others. Heal the Hauraki's kaupapa is aroha and action and aims to link the big challenges we face with actions that everyday people can participate in. [www.healthehauraki.com](http://www.healthehauraki.com)



## NZ Model United Nations

The NZ Model UN (NZMUN), organised by UN Youth and held at Victoria University of Wellington, brings together secondary school delegates and tertiary volunteers from across New Zealand to engage in negotiations and debates, as well as hear from renowned guest speakers. At NZMUN, participants step into the shoes of diplomats, representing countries from across the globe in a realistic simulation of the United Nations. In committees ranging from the Security Council

to the Human Rights Council, delegates debate pressing global issues, draft resolutions, and collaborate to find solutions to some of the world's biggest challenges. The theme for NZMUN 2025 was UN+Limited, which highlighted not only the issues that the global community faces, but also the potential all of the delegates have to drive meaningful change, even in the modern global landscape.



## Aotearoa Marine Carbon Forum

The Aotearoa Marine Carbon Forum brought together researchers, policymakers, iwi and international experts to explore the potential of marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) as part of Aotearoa New Zealand's climate strategy. Through a five-part webinar series and collaborative research, the forum advanced understanding

of nature-based solutions like coastal blue carbon and ocean fertilisation, while promoting a mātauranga Māori approach and informing the development of a national strategy. Endorsed as a UN Ocean Decade Action, the initiative has built strong national and international interest in New Zealand's leadership in marine climate solutions.

## Te Ara Tirama

Te Ara Tirama: Youth Impact Network is a rangatahi-led initiative designed to connect and empower young changemakers across Aotearoa New Zealand. Created by and for young people, the project aims to make leadership and community impact more accessible for students aged 12-16, particularly for those who may not see themselves as traditional leaders,

but who have the passion and potential to create change. Te Ara Tirama have developed a suite of digital resources that form the foundation of an interactive online learning platform. The platform supports young people to upskill in social change, connect with others across the motu, and feel confident to take action on the issues that matter to them.



## Te Kura Waka

Te Kura Waka is a Tauranga-based school dedicated to reviving traditional Polynesian celestial navigation founded by master navigator Jack Thatcher. It trains young navigators in ancestral wayfinding techniques using stars, sun, ocean swells, and bird movements — without modern instruments.

In September, Te Kura Waka's trainee navigators embarked on their final graduation voyage aboard the double-hulled waka hourua Ngahiraka Mai

Tawhiti, sailing from Aotearoa New Zealand to Samoa via Raoul Island and Niue. The journey, named Te Hekenga ki Tua – Seeking the Horizon, marked a spiritual and cultural milestone, with the crew welcomed in Samoa by local communities and voyaging societies. The voyage continued to Tonga before returning to Aotearoa New Zealand, reaffirming the enduring legacy of Polynesian navigation and the importance of mātauranga Māori in contemporary oceanic exploration.

## Wairarapa Film Festival

The Wairarapa Film Festival celebrated its fifth year in 2025 with a diverse programme of films, discussions, and community events placing particular emphasis on education, cultural understanding, and access to film as a tool for learning. The festival showcased films by New Zealand directors, with a focus on films that had strong regional, cultural, and historical connections. Screenings were paired with facilitated discussions that encouraged critical

thinking and reflection, enabling audiences to engage more deeply with the themes and contexts of the films. Special focus was given to youth and lifelong learning, with school groups, tertiary students, and community learners in attendance. The festival enabled intergenerational dialogue, with younger audiences learning directly from filmmakers, producers, and actors about both craft and cultural context.



## Special Feature: General Conference

In November a New Zealand delegation travelled to Samarkand, Uzbekistan – a historic city and World Heritage site – to participate in the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference.



This is the first time since 1985 that the UNESCO General Conference has been held outside Paris.

Our New Zealand delegation was led by National Commission Chair Liz Longworth and included Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of New Zealand to UNESCO, H.E. Sumi Subramaniam; National Commission Secretary General, Vicki Soanes; Policy Advisor, Michelle Ortiz; and Special Advisor Youth, Isaac Morunga.

## New Zealand's contribution to the General Conference

From our plenary address to active interventions across the Programme Commission sessions, New Zealand's voice was consistently present, heard, and respected throughout the General Conference.

Our plenary speech, delivered by Head of Delegation and Chair Liz Longworth, highlighted the significance of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the International Decade of Indigenous Languages for New Zealand, underscoring the unique perspectives we bring to these global priorities.

We also reinforced the importance of the Pacific – emphasising both the strength of our regional relationships and the vital contributions Pacific nations make to UNESCO's work. New Zealand

urged UNESCO to respond to the evolving needs of Pacific communities through collaboration, cultural responsiveness, and a shared vision for sustainable education that empowers future generations.

Our Special Advisor Youth was one of only six delegates selected during the Youth Forum (see page 55) to present its outcomes to the five Programme Commissions. Isaac represented the Forum in the Social and Human Sciences and Natural Sciences Commissions, delivering clear, insightful, and engaging presentations.

His professionalism and eloquence drew significant attention – our delegation was approached by numerous Member States expressing appreciation for Isaac's contributions and noting his compelling presentations.





## Building Pacific Connections

Throughout the General Conference the New Zealand delegation worked closely with other delegates from within the Pacific, holding daily catchups where the region could share information and ensure the region was visible.

## 2025 General Conference Highlights

### **Adoption of Recommendation on the Ethics of Neurotechnology:**

This landmark Recommendation establishes safeguards to ensure neurotechnologies advance human well-being without compromising mental privacy, dignity, or human rights. It addresses risks such as intrusive monitoring, misuse in workplaces, and non-therapeutic applications on children, while promoting equitable access to therapeutic innovations. The framework reflects UNESCO's commitment to guiding emerging technologies ethically, following its earlier work on AI ethics.

### **Election of New Director-General:**

The General Conference endorsed Egyptian Dr Khaled El-Enany Ali Ezz as UNESCO's new Director General for a four-year term. The new Director General was quick to connect with a wide variety of delegates during the General Conference. His first formal meeting was with the SIDS grouping, which included many Pacific countries.

### **Agreement on new International Days:**

The General Conference agreed on three new International Days – an International Day of Engagement in Science for Sustainable Development, a International Day for Small Island Developing States and an International Day for Underwater Cultural Heritage.

### **Revision of the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation:**

The General Conference agreed to revise the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997). A working group will work on the revision ahead of the draft being presented for adoption at the 44th UNESCO General Conference in two years' time.

# Manukura Mātātahi | UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders

Our UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders were involved in a variety of different initiatives and projects both within Aotearoa New Zealand and globally in 2025. We feature their highlights opposite.



## UNESCO Youth Forum

Our Special Advisor Youth, Isaac Morunga represented New Zealand at the 14th UNESCO Youth Forum, prior to the UNESCO General Conference, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Against the backdrop of Samarkand's heritage as the intersection of the historic Silk Road, Isaac joined his fellow youth delegates in shaping a collective call to action, one that urged urgent, inclusive, and ethical responses to the climate crisis, and reaffirmed the power of youth-led solutions rooted in various streams of knowledge and intergenerational legacy, with a special focus on Indigenous knowledge and voices.

"The 14th UNESCO Youth Forum was a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of global youth. It highlighted the need for genuine,



long-term partnerships between local and central government, civil society, and grassroots activators. Visibility in international spaces holds immense value – where impact may be hard to quantify, relationships and the sharing of best practices endure," said Isaac.

## Indigenous Approaches to Climate Change and Meaningful Youth Engagement

In recognition of UN International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples three of our UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders (Isaac Morunga, Mary Ieremia-Allan and Tara Shepherd) presented a session entitled 'Indigenous Approaches to Climate Change and Meaningful Youth Engagement' to youth delegates from around the globe, prior to them attending the 14th UNESCO Youth Forum.

The session was deeply grounded in kaupapa Māori and Pacific perspectives and aimed to amplify Indigenous leadership in climate action. It began with a karakia to set the tone for collective learning and connection, and guided delegates through key themes: the diversity of Indigenous identities, the power of Indigenous knowledge systems, and the urgent need for youth-led, culturally grounded climate responses.

The kōrero highlighted Māori-led initiatives such as Kotahitanga mō te Taiao and the legal personhood of Te Awa Tupua, illustrating how Indigenous worldviews can reshape environmental governance.

It also explored Pacific resilience strategies, from reef protection to storytelling as activism, highlighting the intergenerational wisdom carried by our communities.

The session was not only a space for dialogue, but a call to action: to embed Indigenous knowledge at the heart of climate solutions, and to support youth with the tools and trust to lead.

Our UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders presented alongside UNESCO's Nigel Crawhall, Chief of Section, Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS).

## Marking the International Day of Zero Waste

We marked the International Day of Zero Waste by interviewing UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leader Mary Ieremia-Allan and her Massey University fashion and textile classmate, Akanesi Polaulu Moimoi, about how indigenous methods of fashion and textile production promote zero waste.

## Bringing a slice of UNESCO to Whanganui's youth on International Jazz Day

On 30 April, coinciding with Whanganui's local celebrations of International Jazz Day, our UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders brought together high school students and community representatives for a workshop entitled 'Connecting Communities: UNESCO and Whanganui Youth.'

UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders Wesley Tanuvasa, Saeyavan Sitsabesan, and Isaac Morunga led the workshop, which attracted students from Whanganui Collegiate, Whanganui Girl's College, Cullinane College, and Te Kura. Whanganui Mayor, Andrew Tripe was also in attendance along with representatives from Whanganui Community Music with Whanganui UNESCO Creative City of Design.

The purpose of the workshop was to share UNESCO priorities for Aotearoa New Zealand, reflect on global UN International Day campaigns,



uncover their local relevance, and develop ideas to translate international themes into meaningful, community-driven action. Students and attendees left with a clear objective to be: "inspired to take action to support international movements through local efforts."

## Repping at the Adaptations Future Conference

In November, UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leader Tara Shepherd attended the Adaptation Futures Conference 2025 in Christchurch, which brought together over 1,800 participants from more than 90 countries. As the flagship event of the World Adaptation Science Programme, Adaptation Futures is the leading global forum on climate change adaptation, fostering collaboration among practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and academics.

The National Commission supported Pacific high school students from across Christchurch to participate in a dedicated youth programme, developing Pacific strength-based solutions to climate challenges. Youth-focused sessions featured speakers from UNICEF, Save the Children, and Tara herself.

"It was inspiring to see students so engaged and willing to share their own projects and mahi within their communities," said Tara.



Read Tara's full overview of the Adaptations Future Conference 2025 @ [unesco.org/nz/news](https://unesco.org/nz/news)

## Strengthening Pacific Connections – Mary Ieremia-Allan in Samoa

In June, youth leader Mary Ieremia-Allan joined Secretary General Vicki Soanes in a visit to Samoa to deepen ties with the UNESCO Pacific regional office in Apia, which represents 17 member states across the region. Their visit included high-level meetings with the outgoing UNESCO Pacific Director Shamila Nair-Bedouelle and the UN Resident Co-ordinator and courtesy calls to the Secretary General of the Samoan National Commission for UNESCO and the New Zealand High Commissioner to Samoa.



## Farewell and thank you

We want to say a heartfelt thank you and farewell to our Special Advisor Youth, Isaac Morunga who has been an invaluable member of our team for the past three years, culminating with his stand-out contributions at the 2025 UNESCO Youth Forum and at the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference.

"Isaac has demonstrated during his time at the National Commission that he is a true leader. Working with him has been a joy and an inspiration. I admire the professionalism and maturity he has brought to the youth leader role. Isaac has that rare quality of being both analytical and empathetic. He can be relied upon to remain calm under pressure and to think through a problem then distil it into highly pertinent insights and solutions. He can come up with the right words at the right time."

"Isaac made a remarkable impression at the General Conference. So much so that ambassadors from a number of countries complimented the NZ Delegation on Isaac's numerous contributions. Isaac stepped up to carry a full diplomatic workload, intervening on behalf of New Zealand as if he had been doing it all his career," says Liz Longworth.



# Ngā piringa huriao | International Connections

*Bringing Aotearoa to the world and the world to Aotearoa*

Building and maintaining international connections remains central to our work. In 2025, we embraced numerous opportunities to bring an Aotearoa New Zealand perspective to UNESCO's future initiatives, while also drawing on insights and expertise from our global counterparts to strengthen our mission at home.

## Connecting with HQ

In April, Chair Liz Longworth and Secretary General Vicki Soanes travelled to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to engage with officials across a range of programmes and represent Aotearoa New Zealand at key governance meetings. They joined Sumi Subramaniam, New Zealand's newly appointed Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, for her introductory meetings with UNESCO's Assistant Directors-General.



The visit provided a valuable opportunity to share updates on the National Commission's work, attend the UNESCO Executive Board, and participate in an international meeting of National Commissions. These engagements enabled Liz and Vicki to connect with counterparts from other National Commissions, fostering collaboration and shared learning.

"Being there in person allowed us to strengthen relationships and have more open, informal conversations about our work," said Vicki. "It also gave us direct insight into the Executive Board's decision-making processes, which help shape UNESCO's global priorities."

A key theme throughout the discussions was the fragile state of the world – with over 60 active armed conflicts, increasing threats to multilateralism, economic instability, and the escalating impacts of climate change.

The visit also included bilateral meetings with the Canadian and French National Commissions. With Canada, discussions focused on shared priorities and potential collaboration under the existing letter of engagement. The meeting with France explored respective approaches to National Commission work and the opportunities and challenges each country faces.

## Connecting with the Pacific

We have continued to build relationships with our Pacific neighbours through a number of different contexts. We actively engage with the UNESCO Office for the Pacific States at both the programme and strategic level. In 2025, the UNESCO Executive Board reconfirmed the location of the office as Apia, Samoa.

The Pacific office represents UNESCO to 17 member states across the Pacific region. With a wide diversity of cultural practices, languages, approaches to education and much more, understanding the intersection of programmes and priorities across Pacific Island member states (including Aotearoa New Zealand) is incredibly important in strengthening the resourcing and representation of this region.

Further relationships were made and built during the UNESCO General Conference (see page 51), as well as during a number of on-line meetings held during the course of the year.

# Farewell

## Communication and Information Commissioner, Vanisa Dhuru

In early 2025, we farewelled our Communications and Information Commissioner, Vanisa Dhuru, as she started a new role at the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission, Te Waihanga. We extend our sincere thanks to Vanisa for the energy, expertise, and commitment she brought to the National Commission over the past five years.

Vanisa played a pivotal role in the UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leader programme and contributed across many of our priority areas. Her leadership helped advance conversations around diversity and inclusion, and she was instrumental in raising awareness of the societal impacts of mis- and disinformation.



# Obituaries

## Hon Russell Marshall

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Hon Russell Marshall, who served as an exceptional Chair for the National Commission from 1990 until 1999.

During his time as Chair Russell represented New Zealand on the UNESCO Executive Board, a significant achievement, as it was the last time New Zealand was represented on the Board. Russell was widely respected within UNESCO circles not only in New Zealand but across the Pacific and globally.

*"As Chair of the New Zealand National Commission, he was a progressive thinker skillfully identifying synergies between UNESCO's international programme objectives and developments in this country and opportunities for engagement,"* says Elizabeth Rose, who was the Secretary General of the National Commission while Russell was Chair.

Russell was instrumental in the National Commission and our Pacific colleagues' active engagement in the World Decade for Cultural Development, supporting the region's visibility.

*"Russell drew on his established international networks gained in his roles as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Pacific Island Affairs, to lead the drive for recognition of the specific needs of the Pacific Member States of UNESCO, and of small island states more broadly. He advocated strongly for an equitable share of UNESCO resources to be channelled to this group, ensuring that they received maximum benefit from their UNESCO membership,"* says Elizabeth.

Russell was elected by the Executive Board to the prestigious position of Chair of the Board's Finance and Administration Commission where he had significant influence in re-negotiating the direction of the Organisation as it grappled with the budgetary consequences of the US withdrawal from UNESCO.

*"Russell remained a friend and supporter of the National Commission long after concluding his role as Chair and is fondly remembered as an exceptional Chair,"* says current Secretary General, Vicki Soanes.



## Sir Tumu Te Heuheu Tūkino VIII



He aitua, he aitua, he aitua. Kua hinga he totara i te wao nui a Tāne

We were saddened by the passing in 2025 of Sir Tumu Te Heuheu Tūkino VIII, who made a profound and lasting impact on UNESCO's World Heritage efforts, both in New Zealand and globally. His leadership was marked by a deep commitment to cultural integrity, environmental stewardship, and international cooperation.

Sir Tumu was the first, and only, New Zealander to Chair the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Sir Tumu held this prestigious role with distinction, bringing Māori values and perspectives to the global stage.

He was instrumental in securing Tongariro's recognition in 1993 as the first site in the world to be listed for both its natural and cultural significance. This acknowledged not only the park's volcanic landscape

but also its spiritual and ancestral importance to Ngāti Tūwharetoa.

National Commission Culture Commissioner, Dr Dan Hikuroa remembers Sir Tumu:

*"Sir Tumu championed the idea that intangible cultural heritage – such as traditions, beliefs, and spiritual connections – should be valued equally alongside physical monuments and landscapes."*

Sir Tumu's legacy is one of quiet strength, cultural pride, and visionary leadership. His work not only elevated Māori heritage on the world stage but also reshaped how UNESCO views the interconnectedness of people, land, and spirit."

Former National Commission Chair Margaret Austin, who led the National Commission when Sir Tumu chaired the UNESCO World Heritage Committee pays homage to his leadership, hospitality and generosity.

*"Sir Tumu has a memorable and remarkable legacy of humanitarian and dedicated service domestically and internationally. I recall with great pleasure his welcome to Mr Matsuura, the Director General of UNESCO when he visited the Marae at the base of Mt Tongariro in 2004. He was welcomed by Sir Tumu and a haka by 200 warriors reverberating off the mountain and followed by a hui led by Sir Tumu and six chiefs examining the importance of the World Heritage site and the first in the world to be declared a Natural Cultural environment. It was moving beyond description. Later as Chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Commission he chaired their conference in Christchurch in 2007 and later in 2012 he opened the first Starlight Conference in Takapō. His legacy will be honoured for centuries, and we mourn his passing."*

He kotuku rerenga tahi.

# Contact details

## The New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO

Chair: **Liz Longworth**

Communication and Information:  
**Vanisa Dhiru MNZM**

Culture: **Dr Daniel Hikuroa**

Natural Sciences: **Linda Faulkner**

Education: **Professor Gail Gillon**

Social and Human Sciences: **Laura Black**

Communication and Information: **Dr Mahsa McCauley** (from 18 December 2025)

Special Advisor Youth: **Isaac Morunga**

## Secretariat

Secretary General: **Vicki Soanes**

Senior Advisor: **Yana Selyuk** (until August 2025)

Advisor: **Cherish Pesata** (from October 2025)

Programme Officer: **Silke Bieda**

Communications: **Gabi Tankersley**

Business Support Advisor: **Roslyn McMahan**

## UNESCO Youth Aotearoa Leaders

Isaac Morunga (Special Advisor Youth)

Saeyavan Sitsabesan

Madiha Ali

Wesley Tanuvasa

Tara Shepherd

Mary Ieremia-Allen

## UNESCO offices and links

UNESCO Headquarters Paris  
[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

UNESCO Apia  
[www.unesco.org/new/en/apia](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/apia)

UNESCO Bangkok  
[www.unescobkk.org](http://www.unescobkk.org)

UNESCO Jakarta  
[www.unesco.org/new/en/jakarta/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/jakarta/)

New Zealand Ministry of Education  
[www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz)

UNESCO Memory of the World, New Zealand  
[www.unescomow.org.nz](http://www.unescomow.org.nz)

UNESCO World Heritage, New Zealand  
[www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz)

Dunedin: UNESCO City of Literature  
[www.cityofliterature.co.nz](http://www.cityofliterature.co.nz)

Auckland: UNESCO City of Music  
[www.aucklandcityofmusic.nz](http://www.aucklandcityofmusic.nz)

Wellington: UNESCO City of Film  
[www.wellingtoncityoffilm.com](http://www.wellingtoncityoffilm.com)

Whanganui: UNESCO City of Design  
<https://cityofdesignwhanganui.nz/>

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Te Kōmihana Matua o Aotearoa mō UNESCO



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