

Recloaking Papatūānuku and Think Like A Forest:
A Case Study in Narrative, Science and System Change

by Emeritus Professor David Norton & Simon Millar
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INTRODUCTION

This case study documents the development of **Recloaking Papatūānuku** and the **Think Like a Forest** campaign as a single, evolving programme. In **Part One**, we review the evolution of Recloaking Papatūānuku through to the present day (mid 2026) and then in **Part Two**, we outline how we see this initiative developing on to an implementable programme for on-the-ground mahi.

It reflects the perspective of Pure Advantage Executive Director *Simon Millar* and Emeritus Professor *David Norton*, who have held continuity across science, narrative, policy and engagement from the very outset of the development of this programme. The case study draws on a wide network of contributors including Pure Advantage trustees, iwi and Māori leaders, scientists, policymakers, businesses and community practitioners.

It should be read as:

- A record of how the initiative has been conceived and refined;
- A description of its technical, economic and ecological foundations;
- An articulation of the conditions required for implementation; and
- Should be read in association with the supporting materials and modeling at [PureAdvantage.org](https://pureadvantage.org)¹

Recloaking Papatūānuku is not a static programme. It is a living national proposition.

Pure Advantage (PA), along with its partners, has developed and shaped **Recloaking Papatūānuku**² (RP) since December 2022. What follows traces how the initiative has evolved over time, the conditions that gave rise to it, and the key inflection points that have influenced its direction. It also proposes criteria that would need to be met for an ecological restoration project to align with the RP vision.

Recloaking Papatūānuku did not emerge as a single proposal or campaign. Rather, it represents the culmination of more than a decade of work by PA and its collaborators to articulate the role of native forests in strengthening Aotearoa New Zealand's environmental, economic and social resilience. Its evolution has been shaped by scientific insight, lived experience of extreme weather events, policy settings, political realities and ongoing engagement with a wide range of stakeholders.

This case study is intended as a transparent record of that journey – including its achievements, challenges and constraints – and as an example of how a large-scale, visionary **Nature-based Solutions**³ initiative has been conceived, tested, refined and socialised in a complex and changing context, as seen from the perspective of those tasked with holding continuity across science, narrative, policy and engagement over time.

CONTEXT: NATURAL ADVANTAGE AND SYSTEMS DECLINE

New Zealand's natural environment underpins our economy, identity and global positioning. Yet the evidence shows a widening disconnect between this perception and environmental reality.

Nature underpins everything we value, but:

- Approximately two thirds of indigenous forest has been lost since humans arrived in Aotearoa;
- Around 90 percent of wetlands have been removed;
- Freshwater systems are degraded;
- Invasive plants and animals are causing havoc across our ecosystems; and
- Climate risks are intensifying.

This context is not simply environmental. RP is a systems answer to a complex problem and needs to be looked at in the context of social, ecological and economic systems together.

¹ <https://pureadvantage.org/>

² <https://pureadvantage.org/recloaking-papatuanuku/>

³ <https://www.unepfi.org/nature/nature/nature-based-solutions/>

WHAT IS RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU?

Recloaking Papatūānuku is framed as an ambitious environmental restoration initiative to:

- Build landscape resilience;
- Enhance native biodiversity;
- Ensure that existing carbon stocks are retained in the biosphere; and
- Sequester ongoing CO₂ emissions.

Recloaking Papatūānuku proposes to achieve this through:

- The restoration and enhancement of more than 2 million ha of new, regenerating and degraded native forest and wetlands across Aotearoa; and
- Sustaining, and where appropriate, enhancing our existing old-growth native forests in the face of a range of degrading factors, especially ungulate browse.

Both approaches are essential for helping society and the environment in Aotearoa New Zealand cope with the rapidly escalating climate crisis.

RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU



A photograph of a lush, moss-covered forest. Large, ancient-looking trees with thick trunks and intricate branch structures dominate the scene. The ground is covered in a dense carpet of vibrant green ferns. In the background, a person wearing a red shirt and a blue backpack is seen from behind, standing amidst the foliage. The overall atmosphere is misty and serene, with soft light filtering through the canopy.

Part One: Evolution of a Movement

*Recloaking Papatūānuku represents the culmination
of more than a decade of work*

OUR FOREST FUTURE⁴ (2016)

Established the economic case for expanding native forests and proposed 'Every Tree Counts', which informed the creation of **Trees That Count**⁵ and helped shape early philanthropic and investment thinking in native forest restoration.

Ō TĀTOU NGAHERE⁶ (2021–2022)

A major collaborative programme led in partnership with Tāne's Tree Trust:

- Involved more than 60 expert contributors;
- Produced extensive research outputs, media and a documentary;
- Detailed how native forests can be integrated into our landscapes for multiple benefits; and
- Culminated in a **national conference**⁷ at Te Papa Tongarewa Wellington in October 2022, with more than 1,000 total participants.

This phase catalysed a broader movement reframing native forests as ecological infrastructure, economic assets and landscape resilience systems.

FORMATION OF RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU (2022)

A December 2022 year end event convened by Pure Advantage involved:

- Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern;
- Government Ministers; and
- Business and environmental leaders.

This event helped crystallise RP as a concept, with the initial thinking underpinned by:

- Risks of carbon farming using exotic monocultures;
- Recognition that such approaches would not adequately address the climate emergency; and
- The need for a more integrated, resilient land use model.

An initial proposal⁸ of 5 million hectares in 5 years for 5 million New Zealanders was proposed but was subsequently refined to 2 million hectares over 30 years.

⁴ <https://pureadvantage.org/our-forest-future/>

⁵ <https://treesthatcount.co.nz/>

⁶ <https://pureadvantage.org/o-tatou-ngahere/>

⁷ <https://pureadvantage.org/o-tatou-ngahere/>

⁸ Refer original letter in appendix from Emeritus Professor David Norton to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

CLIMATE EVENTS AS CATALYST (EARLY 2023)

Severe weather events including Cyclone Hale, Auckland Floods and Cyclone Gabrielle exposed the fragility of our landscapes, the massive sediment losses through erosion and the vulnerability of infrastructure and communities. Estimated costs of NZD 9–14 billion for remedying these impacts reinforced the need for land use change and catchment scale resilience. As a result, Recloaking Papatūānuku moved from concept to necessity.

DEFINING THE INITIATIVE

Developing from these, Recloaking Papatūānuku has been framed as:

An ambitious national-scale environmental restoration proposition to restore and enhance over 2 million hectares of indigenous forest and wetlands across Aotearoa.

Its objectives are to:

- Build landscape resilience;
- Enhance native biodiversity;
- Ensure that existing carbon stocks are retained in the biosphere; and
- Sequester ongoing CO₂ emissions.

Crucially, it adopts a mosaic land-use approach, integrating restorative activities with other sustainable and productive land use systems and importantly being informed by catchment-based logic and planning. Recloaking Papatūānuku proposes to achieve this through:

- The restoration and enhancement of more than 2 million ha of new, regenerating and degraded native forest and wetlands across Aotearoa; and
- Sustaining, and where appropriate, enhancing our existing old-growth native forests in the face of a range of degrading factors.

Both approaches are essential for helping society and the environment in Aotearoa New Zealand cope with the rapidly escalating climate crisis.

RP AS A SYSTEMS RESPONSE TO INTERLINKED CHALLENGES

The initiative addresses multiple interconnected pressures including biodiversity decline, freshwater degradation, erosion and sedimentation as well as climate change. Indigenous forests once stabilised soils, filtered water and supported biodiversity while their removal has contributed to carbon emissions, degraded ecosystems and increased vulnerability to landscapes. Recloaking Papatūānuku responds to all these issues simultaneously.

FROM CONCEPT TO MODEL (2023)

Following the sequence of severe weather events in early 2023, Recloaking Papatuanuku was further developed into a formal proposal.

Economic **modelling**⁹ led by McKinsey & Company demonstrated:

- Feasibility for restoration of approximately 2 million hectares over 30 years; and
- Indicative pathways rather than definitive forecasts.

The modelling highlighted areas requiring further refinement, including input costs, carbon yield assumptions and implementation complexity.

ECONOMIC AND SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION

Economic modelling was developed using 2023 data and indicated:

- Programme cost: ~NZD 8.5–12 billion to 2050;
- Carbon sequestration: ~1,500 million tonnes CO₂ to 2100; and
- Abatement cost: ~\$32/tCO₂ vs ~\$60/tCO₂ for international offsets.

This suggested that Recloaking Papatūānuku could function as a domestic alternative to offshore carbon expenditure and as a generator of local economic and environmental value.

*Recloaking Papatūānuku is not a substitute for substantial emissions reduction.
It is a complementary mechanism.*

It is important to note that this modelling was indicative and contingent on policy settings at the time. The model indicated that Recloaking Papatūānuku could be financially achievable in principle, particularly if assessed against the cost of international offsets and if New Zealand's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) liabilities were recognised within Crown accounts. The funding model developed in 2023 was predicated on appropriate policy alignment, stable carbon settings and the ability to channel capital toward high integrity domestic sequestration.

The model determined that funding RP could be cheaper than purchasing international offsets for meeting NDC commitments. It did not represent a fully committed or de-risked delivery pathway, and further work was anticipated to refine assumptions, validate costs and establish enabling mechanisms. The policy environment around NDC commitments has shifted since the 2023 modelling, which affects how the original assumptions about Crown participation should be read.

⁹ <https://pureadvantage.org/recloaking-papatuanuku/> refer to business case report

NARRATIVE AND ENGAGEMENT

In parallel with modelling, significant work was undertaken to translate the technical proposition into a coherent public-facing narrative and large-scale environmental vision aligned with both domestic and international expectations for Nature-based Solutions.

This involved:

- Synthesising scientific research;
- Incorporating mātauranga Māori;
- Applying catchment-based logic;
- Articulating policy rationale; and
- Multi-sector collaboration.

This work was realised through a digital platform at [PureAdvantage.org](https://pureadvantage.org/)¹⁰ designed to communicate RP in a clear and accessible way.

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL POSITIONING (2023)

Recloaking Papatūānuku was:

- Presented to major political parties prior to the 2023 general election;
- Included in the Labour Party Climate Manifesto 2023;
- Launched publicly in November 2023; and
- Presented globally at [COP28 in Dubai](#)¹¹, also in November 2023.

The COP28 session included:

- Marama Royal - Chair of the Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei Trust and Co-Chair of Pou Take Āhuarangi/Climate Change lead for the National Iwi Chairs Forum;
- Hon Simon Watts Minister of Climate Change for the National Party;
- Presented by Simon Millar Executive Director for Pure Advantage; and
- International panel participants included Keith Tuffley (Citi), Alice Ruhweza (WWF International), and Hon James Shaw (former Minister of Climate Change, The Green Party Aotearoa, NZ) in an event moderated by Kayla Kingdon-Bebb (WWF-New Zealand).

This positioned RP within New Zealand's climate response and the global nature-based solutions discourse.

REFINEMENT AND EXPANSION (2024)

Key developments included the integration of wetlands, adding an emphasis on old growth forests, carrying out broader stakeholder engagement and increased scientific and policy refinement. A visit by Canadian conservationist [Dr Harvey Locke](#)¹² reinforced the urgency of retaining and sustaining old growth forests and other intact ecosystems as well as investing in restoring new forests and enhancing degraded forests.

¹⁰ <https://pureadvantage.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRg10-qxH18&list=PLCeRD3L1BLGBPjiFvww-YscIButdxfxvI>

¹² <https://harveylocke.com/>

THINK LIKE A FOREST (2025)

In response to a changing political and policy environment, Pure Advantage made a strategic decision to deepen public engagement through authentic storytelling, producing Think Like A Forest as the principal narrative vehicle for Recloaking Papatūānuku.

The **Think Like A Forest**¹³ film translated the initiative into a lived experience presenting real world examples of Recloaking Papatūānuku in action, highlighting iwi leadership and landowner and community connection, building public trust and providing a compelling engagement platform. A key output was production of a companion **policy brief**¹⁴ targeted to political parties, government agencies and the private sector.

The impact of Think Like a Forest included:

- Launch event at The Beehive, New Zealand's Executive Wing of Parliament Buildings;
- More than 300,000 views;
- Community organised national and international screenings;
- Air New Zealand in-flight entertainment; and
- 15 interviews—Extra for Experts—who are featured in the film.

Think Like a Forest became a central narrative vehicle and marked an important inflection point for the RP kaupapa, reframing public and stakeholder engagement at a time when policy and implementation pathways remained uncertain.



Sam the Trap Man is a modern-day bushman and conservationist whose deep connection to the whenua brings the vision of Recloaking Papatūānuku powerfully to life.

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EumkdJobmw&t=189s

¹⁴ <https://pureadvantage.org/policy-brief-how-thinking-like-a-forest-can-build-climate-resilience/>

KEY INFLECTION POINTS FOR RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU

Across RP's evolution, key strengths emerged:

- Wide stakeholder buy-in to a vision that people could intuitively grasp, and an approach that builds on other restoration work.
- Central role for iwi/Māori leadership; and
- Strong conceptual support with private sector interest.

At the same time, key challenges became evident:

- Lack of formal commitment from Government;
- Policy barriers;
- Need for credible yet complex governance structure;
- Complexity around high-integrity measurement and finance mechanisms; and
- Aligning various restoration activities for holistic outcomes is difficult.

Despite these challenges, momentum has continued to build. This suggests Recloaking Papatūānuku can function as:

- A living national proposition - it is socially validated and a national challenge to inspire all New Zealanders;
- A collection of robust science that improves landscapes and ecosystems;
- A framework to building a market that could fund and deliver nature restoration at scale; and
- A brand and standard to coordinate and empower a range of projects from landscape-scale restoration to individual landowners and everywhere in-between.

RP is not a fixed programme, but an evolving initiative whose future depends on alignment and long-term commitment. It is a whole system proposition to solve an array of interconnected problems.

This position marked a transition point. Having established a credible narrative with a scientific and economic foundation, the central question now became how Recloaking Papatūānuku should move from proposition to implementation?



"We need our forests. I love water, but I can't do water without trees." —**Mere Tamanui**



Part Two: Beyond Think Like A Forest

*From proposition to implementation—
making Recloaking Papatūānuku a reality.*

FROM NARRATIVE TO IMPLEMENTATION

The success of Think Like a Forest marked a shift from awareness to expectation, and from narrative to delivery. The challenge became the establishment of a delivery pathway for activation.

CORE PROGRAMME LOGIC

Recloaking Papatūānuku is not defined by scale alone. **It is defined by where restoration occurs, how landscapes function and how resilience is built.** The primary benefit is landscape resilience with carbon and biodiversity as enduring co-benefits.

PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

Recloaking Papatūānuku involves:

- Restoring new forests and wetlands in areas where they are absent;
- Enhancing existing degraded and regenerating forests through plant and animal pest control and enrichment plantings;
- Enhancing old-growth forests through animal pest management, ranging from extensive ungulate control through to eradication of all animal pest species; and
- Actively transitioning non-rotational pine plantations and other exotic tree crops to native forests.

These interventions operate across both public and private land, with Recloaking Papatūānuku being much more than just the number of trees in the ground, no matter how many – it's where those trees are planted and restored that really matters, not the number. And it's about wetlands as well as forests.

Recloaking Papatūānuku is founded on the premise that restoring and enhancing native forests and wetlands, and looking after our existing old-growth forests, will lead to enhanced landscape resilience against the increasingly frequent severe weather events New Zealand is encountering. This is the single most important benefit of Recloaking Papatūānuku for Aotearoa. To enhance landscape resilience, restoration needs to be undertaken in those places within catchments that yield the maximum benefits of reduced sediment and water loss, while at the same time providing habitat for native biodiversity and drawing down atmospheric CO₂.

The key to successful implementation of Recloaking Papatūānuku is for it to be undertaken at the catchment scale. This is essential as the impacts of climate change are most strongly felt at the catchment scale (through severe flooding and sediment loss) and this is also the scale at which native biodiversity needs to be managed if it is to be sustained and enhanced for the long term.

INVESTMENT AND MARKET OPPORTUNITY

Since the initial development of the RP indicative funding model in 2023, the broader policy and investment context has evolved. Changes in policy ambition and approach to climate response, including under the Sixth National Coalition Government, have altered the degree to which earlier assumptions around Crown participation, Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) liability treatment, and domestic investment pathways could be relied upon. As a result, while the ecological rationale for Recloaking Papatūānuku remains evermore viable, the economic pathways to implementation now require greater emphasis on market-led mechanisms, blended finance and independent institutional structures.

Engagement with the private sector indicates:

- A strong demand for high-integrity carbon investments;
- Interest from global capital providers; and
- Alignment with emerging nature-related disclosure frameworks.

The attractiveness of Recloaking Papatūānuku lies in:

- New Zealand's distinctive biota;
- The NZ institutional and governance landscape that is trusted and transparent;
- The involvement of an indigenous world view;
- The ability to scale; and
- Multiple ecological and community co-benefits.

MARKET DEMAND AND OPPORTUNITY

As investment interest has grown, so too has the need to move beyond a conceptual proposition toward a credible implementation architecture. PA-convened workshop discussions indicated broad support for Recloaking Papatūānuku as an investable proposition, particularly where investment can be supported by high-integrity measurement, monitoring, verification and assurance, and where carbon is paired with biodiversity, landscape resilience and social co-benefits. The scale of RP, together with its catchment-based logic and mosaic pattern of land-use approach, is a key part of its attractiveness to investors and landowners.

CONSTRAINTS TO CAPITAL

At the same time, stakeholders have identified several practical conditions that would need to be addressed before large-scale capital could flow with confidence. These include aggregation and geospatial targeting of the right land in the right places for the right purposes, development of scientifically robust and scalable verification systems, policy and market alignment, and a credible intermediary structure able to coordinate activity between investor demand and on-the-ground supply.

There needs to be a clear distinction between the long-term aspiration of an RP-specific premium credit framework and the near-term practicality of working with existing internationally recognised carbon crediting infrastructure. There may be scope over time to develop a distinct RP standard or unit (see below), but a more immediate pathway could be to attach a high-integrity New Zealand nature-positive or RP “tag” to credits issued under internationally recognised standards, provided that the underlying programme attributes can be measured and verified credibly.

IMPLEMENTING RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU

RPU FRAMEWORK

The implementation approach proposed here is based on the idea of a set of Recloaking Papatūānuku principles and a corresponding funding instrument, for example a Recloaking Papatūānuku Unit (RPU). In this framing, RPUs would not function simply as conventional carbon credits, rather, RPUs would represent a broader carbon-plus instrument, intended to reward enduring carbon sequestration alongside measurable gains in landscape resilience and biodiversity.

CREDIT ARCHETYPES

In practice, this architecture is likely to require different classes or tiers of credits across different ecological project types or archetypes. These are related, but distinct, and may include activities such as; new restoration planting, supported natural reversion, enhancement of existing degraded forests, and mature forest pest control. Wetlands are also included, both restored and new. The mature forest pest control archetype has been identified as a potentially early and economically viable example, with landscape-scale pilots being scoped by coalition partners, and is seen as one possible pathway for generating early cashflow and informing the development of a broader RPU system. That said, this approach should be framed as an emerging implementation possibility rather than a settled institutional design.

SYSTEM DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Central principles include a system that is simple, transparent and efficient, maximising the proportion of funding that reaches on-the-ground mahi. At the same time, any governing entity must be rigorous enough to guarantee that the funded mahi actually delivers the resilience, biodiversity and carbon outcomes that the RP vision requires.

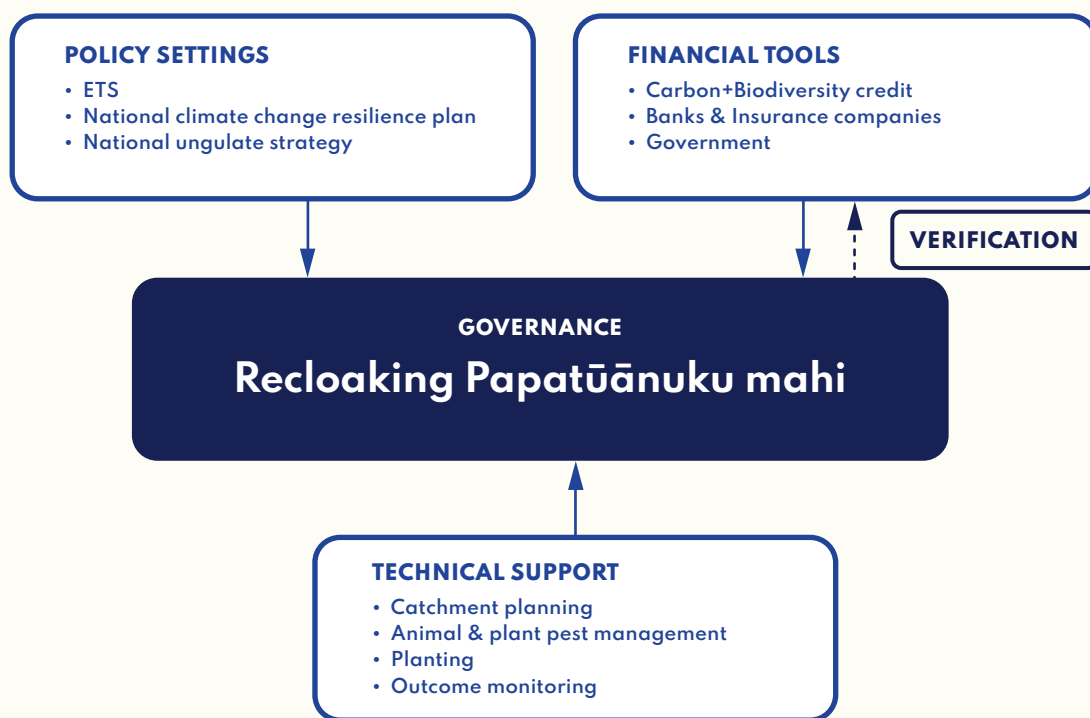


Diagram 1: Schematic high-lighting the key components that are likely required to implement Recloaking Papatūānuku.

CORE ORGANISATIONAL ROLES

Four core categories of organisations could be required to implement Recloaking Papatūānuku.

First, there is the **Recloaking Papatūānuku governing entity**. This entity would hold the vision, certify that projects meet the RP principles, and provide the authenticity and integrity of the overall framework. It is envisaged as independent, transparent, inclusive and high integrity, with a governing rather than implementing role. Its legitimacy depends on remaining separate from commercial delivery interests and from undue influence by either government or funders.

Second, there are **funders or customers**, who would provide the financial resources to undertake the work by purchasing RPUs or equivalent units. These funders could include private sector buyers, philanthropy and government, with banks and insurers also identified as plausible participants given their direct interest in resilient landscapes and reduced physical risk.

Third, there are **implementers** - the groups carrying out the on-the-ground mahi. These may include farmers, catchment groups, iwi landholders, large land-owning groups, government agencies, and in some cases mission-aligned or charitable benefit entities. Implementation is more likely to occur through aggregated entities than through small individual farms, unless landholdings are substantial.

Fourth, there are **independent third-party verifiers**, who would use a combination of field assessment and remote sensing to verify that projects are delivering the resilience, biodiversity and carbon outcomes they claim. This verification function is critical to investor confidence and to the long-term credibility of the RP proposition.

GOVERNING ENTITY AND MARKET FORMATION

The governing entity is fundamental to the whole process. Its core roles are to hold the RP vision, certify projects against the RP principles, and ensure that what is funded under the RP banner is genuinely aligned with the kaupapa and its outcomes. It is not envisaged as a regulator, nor as the primary delivery vehicle. Rather, it is the custodian of the vision, the standards and the legitimacy of the system.

An initial orchestrator role may be needed to help establish the market, build confidence and create early liquidity. However, governance and market making (liquidity providers or brokers) are not the same thing. Early market making is likely to emerge from coalition partners with landscape-scale pilots and the operational infrastructure to support credit issuance. This should be understood as one possible evolution path rather than a settled governance decision.

The governing entity should be lean and efficient, overseen by a board or trustees, with only the staffing needed to carry out its core functions. Cash-flow handling should sit separately from vision-holding and certification, with a market intermediary or central clearing mechanism potentially managing payment flows in order to improve transparency and efficiency.

Start-up funding will be needed to provide catalytic support before meaningful cash-flows could begin from RPU purchases, and that early funding may need to come from government and/or philanthropic partners in order to help maintain independence from commercial funders during establishment.

POLICY SETTINGS AND THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

Implementation cannot rest on private finance and delivery architecture alone. Effective policy settings and technical support are essential if the system is to function. The central government therefore has a key enabling role, even if it is not the principal long-term funder.

The key policy elements identified include:

- A National Climate Change and Landscape Resilience Plan with Recloaking Papatūānuku at its core;
- Transparent accounting of New Zealand's NDC obligations;
- Clarification of the relationship between RP and the ETS, including possible reform and consideration of the long-term liabilities associated with exotic monocultures;
- Consideration of the growing science of non-equivalence, which suggests nature-based removals are more credible in New Zealand when used for contribution claims and short-lived emissions rather than as offsets for fossil carbon; and
- Development of a National Ungulate Strategy to address the destructive impacts of invasive browsing animals, especially deer, on both new and existing native forests.

Additionally, how New Zealand's position relating to corresponding adjustments for nature-based removals and Article 6 evolve, will also influence RP's policy elements.

PA has identified governance, policy and regulation, land suitability and aggregation, funding structures, premium credit development, and measurement and verification systems as the main implementation streams required to advance RP.

LONG-TERM FUNDING INTEGRITY

One of the more important technical points is that RPU's should not simply fund establishment activity. A proportion of the revenue attached to each unit needs to be reserved to support long-term ongoing management once credit revenue declines or ceases, especially in relation to old-growth forest protection and ongoing pest and ungulate control.

This is a crucial distinction and reinforces that Recloaking Papatūānuku is not a short-cycle planting programme. It is a permanence-based resilience and stewardship model. In essence RP requires some form of sustainable long-term funding mechanisms potentially solved by policy or market settings to help underwrite future management obligations, while ensuring that only a small and tightly controlled portion of each unit funds central operations.



"Forests are amazing. They provide habitat for our native species, keep our water clean, keep our hills together, and they give us oxygen... that's useful." —**Malcolm Rutherford**

THE PROPOSED RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU PRINCIPLES

The RP principles are envisaged as underpinning any **gold standard carbon-plus credit** that is unique to Aotearoa New Zealand. The distinguishing feature of these principles is that they do not focus solely on tonnes of carbon sequestered. They evaluate the extent to which a project contributes to landscape resilience and native biodiversity, and require that these values be considered in a catchment context. In this sense, the RP principles are intended to reward genuine additionality across multiple dimensions and to secure enduring, in-perpetuity benefits.

The seven RP principles that underpin any such **gold standard carbon-plus RPU credit** are:

1. The project should contribute to **landscape resilience, native biodiversity conservation and atmospheric CO₂ sequestration**;
2. It should be developed through **landscape-scale catchment logic and planning**, with an explicit focus on resilience to extreme storm events;
3. It should be developed in partnership with the people of the catchment and/or **mana whenua**, with active local support and participation in implementation;
4. It should embed **short-term management planning within long-term outcome setting**, including ongoing management requirements;
5. A proportion of revenue from each RPU must be set aside in a **durable funding mechanism** to guarantee long-term management;
6. It should be able to demonstrate **enduring additionality** across carbon, biodiversity and resilience outcomes; and
7. Monitoring and reporting should be **fully transparent**.

While the aspiration is for a distinctly New Zealand, high-integrity RP framework, it remains open whether this ultimately takes the form of a stand alone Aotearoa New Zealand standard or a verified RP layer attached to existing internationally recognised carbon credit systems.

The emerging implementation model for Recloaking Papatūānuku is therefore not simply a funding concept, nor solely a restoration programme. It represents the outline of a potential new institutional architecture: one in which a trusted independent governing entity holds the vision and standards; funders purchase high-integrity units linked to measurable carbon, biodiversity and resilience outcomes; implementers deliver the on-the-ground mahi at catchment scale; and independent verification ensures credibility over time.

In this model, carbon remains central, but not sufficient on its own. The value of Recloaking Papatūānuku lies in its ability to channel finance into enduring landscape repair, biodiversity recovery and long-term resilience, while aligning ecological reality, investor confidence and public legitimacy.

Taking such a long-term perspective means the credits created by RP are aligned not only to what the market currently values, but is well positioned as the voluntary and compliance markets evolve (and potentially) converge over the medium-long term. Thereby, ensuring the asset created by RP is aware of where value is moving, not just where it is today and creating assets of longer-term durable value.

The work ahead is therefore not only to further test and prove the proposition, but to establish the governance, policy, technical systems and early capital required to make it real.

ABOUT PURE ADVANTAGE & ITS ROLE IN RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU

Pure Advantage is an environmental NGO backed by leaders in business and academia, focused on advancing sustainable pathways for Aotearoa New Zealand to thrive in a low-emissions, nature-positive economy. Its work is grounded in the belief that aligning economic activity with the country's natural advantages can deliver strategic benefits for the environment, society and long-term prosperity.

Over more than a decade, Pure Advantage has played a convening and translational role across science, policy, business and community, helping to surface and articulate system-level opportunities where environmental restoration and economic development can be mutually reinforcing.

In relation to Recloaking Papatūānuku, Pure Advantage has acted as a catalyst, integrator and steward of the kaupapa (foundational principles). Its role has been to bring together scientific research, economic analysis, policy thinking, practical restoration experience and diverse stakeholder perspectives into a coherent national proposition. It has helped convene partners, communicate the vision, build public understanding, foster collaboration across sectors and maintain continuity as the initiative evolved through changing environmental, political and market contexts.

At the beginning of 2025, three interconnected workstreams were proposed:

- To hold and amplify the Recloaking Papatūānuku meta-narrative, including the release and promotion of Think Like A Forest;
- To support policy and market development aimed at unlocking enabling mechanisms for Nature-based Solutions;
- To help initiate demonstration projects and partnerships capable of testing and refining implementation pathways.

Pure Advantage recognised that large-scale delivery would ultimately require broader coalitional structures, independent governance arrangements, specialist implementation capability and new forms of public, private and philanthropic investment. By 2026, Recloaking Papatūānuku had evolved from a Pure Advantage-led initiative into a broader collaborative effort involving multiple organisations, funders, practitioners and communities. Pure Advantage's ongoing role is therefore focused on supporting the vision, maintaining narrative integrity, sharing knowledge and lessons, convening strategic partnerships, and acting as a bridge between science, policy, business, communities and investment to help create the conditions required for implementation at scale.

PURE ADVANTAGE TRUSTEES

Recloaking Papatūānuku has been strengthened by the continued commitment of trustees who have contributed time, funding, expertise and strategic guidance across programme development matters.

Katherine Corich, Andrew Grant, Phillip Mills (founder), Rob Morrison (chair), Geoff Ross, Dame Anne Salmond, Sir Stephen Tindall.



"This place is special. It's like one big cosmic hug." —**Dame Anne Salmond**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Emeritus Professor *David Norton* is a conservation biologist and passionate lover of the mountains and forests of New Zealand where he spends much of his time tramping. He is an Emeritus Professor from the University of Canterbury and Strategic Science Advisor to Pure Advantage. David lives at Lake Hāwea.



Simon Millar is the Executive Director of Pure Advantage and the Producer of Think Like A Forest. He is a creative sector innovator, sustainability and impact strategist, and advocate for regenerative futures. Simon has extensive experience in management and business development across both corporate America and New Zealand.



Design: Warren Elwin @welskin

Photography: Alistair Guthrie @alistairguthrie

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Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister New Zealand

22 December 2022

Kia ora Prime Minister.

It was lovely to meet and talk to you at the Pure Advantage dinner in Auckland earlier this week. I wanted to reiterate the key points I made to you then about transitional exotic forests and what might be a viable alternative for permanent forests in the ETS.

As an ecologist with over 40-years' experience undertaking research on our native forests, I believe that it is **ecologically fraudulent** for anyone to claim that exotic forests established for carbon sequestration will transition to native forests without guarantees being met.

Specifically:

- There is no credible scientific evidence for widespread transitioning of exotic forests established for carbon sequestration to native forests, despite the claims of proponents.
- In a small number of special situations (e.g., in areas with reliable rainfall and near native forest seed sources), exotic forests might transition but will still require active properly funded management to ensure that the transition actually occurs.
- Our research has shown that opening the exotic canopy to allow light into the forest without causing soil damage (perhaps through poisoning of exotic canopy trees) and establishment of future native canopy trees are critical for successful transitioning.
- There is also a need for active management to prevent transitional exotic forests becoming sources of fire, disease, and animal and plant pests (including the planted exotic conifers causing wilding spread) impacting adjacent private and public land including public conservation land and production exotic forests.
- This management will need to occur for 100 years or more.
- In my mind if we are to contemplate any exotic transitional forests in the ETS, then at a minimum there must be a regulated requirement for the following to guarantee the transition might occur:
 - A 100-year management plan that outlines how the transition will be managed including the milestones that need to be met to provide confidence that native forest is establishing, and the budgets required to implement this management.
 - Regular audits (5 yearly) to ensure that management is occurring and that the milestones for transition are being met (funded out of the carbon credits).
 - Withholding of a sufficient portion of the carbon income from the forest to ensure that this management is funded. This may be as much as half of the carbon income from the forest in the short term in order to cover management in the longer-term when carbon income declines (this is required to discount the uncertainties).

There is no evidence to date from existing exotic carbon forests to suggest that this management will be implemented.

Prime Minister, I am deeply concerned about the inclusion of exotic transition forests as Permanent Forests in the ETS. These forests are not permanent in any ecological sense and my fear is that **we are imposing a massive liability on future generations** to clean up the mess that these forests will likely create.

This mess will include the liabilities for the carbon lost as the exotic trees age and die and are not replaced, the costs of managing the pests that reside in these forests, the potential risk unmanaged exotic forests pose to our production exotic forests which are critical for Aotearoa, the downstream effects on water quality, and the impacts on the social fabric of rural communities, Māori and Pākehā alike.

I totally understand the challenges that Māori face and the reasons why they are so interested in earning carbon credits. But I honestly believe that Māori are vulnerable to being ripped off by local and foreign investors who are only interested in the income from carbon for the first few decades, while Māori will be left with all of the liabilities after that.

The climate crisis is an existential threat to all of us and we need to find urgent, long-term solutions. I believe we are in a unique position globally to provide international leadership. We can show the whole world that by adopting **Nature based Solutions** that focus on active management and restoration of native forests we can not only address the existential threat of global warming, but we can also build genuine resilience into our landscapes, tackle the massive biodiversity crisis we are facing in Aotearoa and address some of the injustices and inequities that have arisen for Māori from 200 years of European colonisation.

Prime Minister, I want my children (and my two-week old grandchild) to be able to realise their full potentials and live in a World that is not mired in the inevitable environmental and social chaos that will occur if we do not tackle this crisis now. I do not want our generation to be seen as having failed our children and grandchildren, I believe very strongly in the notion of being a good ancestor – this is our chance, and we only have one chance.

It would be inspiring if you could seize this opportunity. An amazing ambitious but achievable goal would be to establish a national forest initiative (perhaps called **‘Recloaking Papa-tuānuku’**) to support landowners (including iwi and farmers) in having 5 million ha of private and public native forests, degraded, regenerating and new, under active management for carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation within 5 years. Imagine that!

Prime Minister, we have to do this. Under your leadership, such an initiative would be a fantastic response to the recent COP on Biodiversity, where Justin Trudeau brought together so many nations to try and protect our living planet and made a major commitment to ecological restoration in Canada.

As you have rightly said, *“Climate change is my generation’s nuclear free moment”*, but at present, the government is widely seen, both at home and abroad, as failing to meet that challenge. In parallel with ‘The Christchurch Call’, ‘Recloaking Papa-tuānuku’ could be seen as a defining legacy of your government.

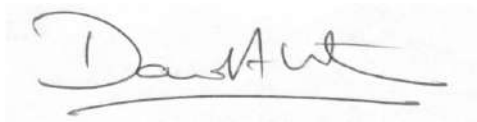
I am scared that if we do not have a programme like this in place, we will not be able to tackle the threats we face and we will fail all future generations. I believe that you and your government are the only people who can do this, and we need to do it now and before the next election.

This will come at a cost, but we have no choice. The consequences of not doing this are too great. As well as direct Government investment and in the future, income from carbon credits, we need to explore novel funding streams to ensure that this occurs. There are lots of ways this can be done through biodiversity credits and other financial instruments (which I understand the Pure Advantage Trustees are currently looking at). Two possible novel funding sources that come to my mind are:

- Those who make money out of our food and fibre products, and from international tourism, should be required to invest into this programme;
- Government investing some of the \$10-20 billion in offshore carbon credits it is committed to buying by 2030 to meet our climate commitments.

I am happy to discuss these issues further with you, Ministers Nash and Shaw, and anyone else.

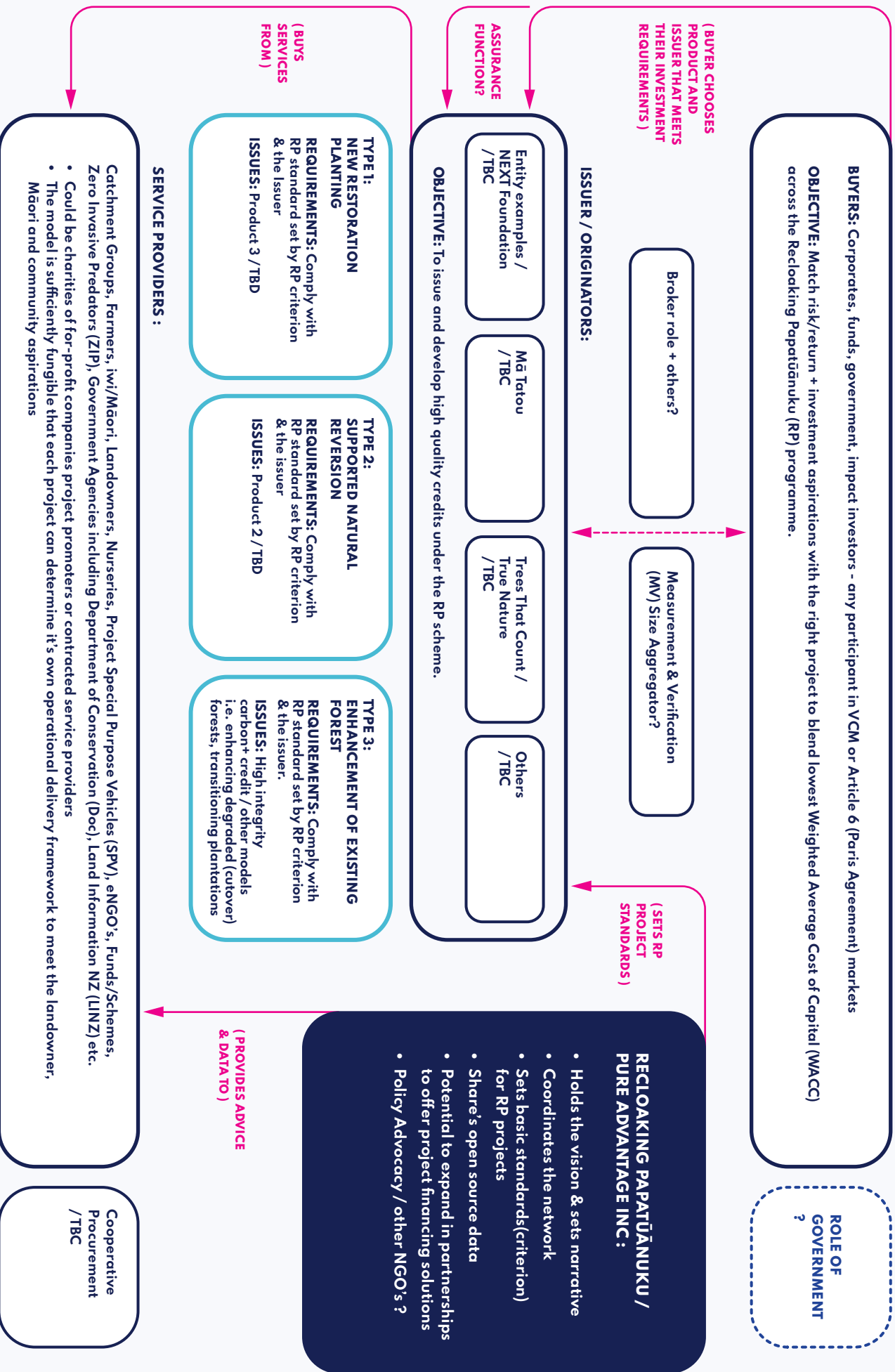
Ngā mihi nui

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Norton', with a horizontal line underneath.

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Recloaking Papatūānuku: Possible Delivery Model

KEY: RECLOAKING PAPATŪĀNUKU = RP





Ka ora te wai ā te whenua hoki,
ka ora te tāngata.

*When the water and land are well,
the people are well.*

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