

# Next invests in Tāpui Aotearoa

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NEXT is investing in a new environmental initiative, becoming founding partners in Tāpui Aotearoa, which is exploring how to protect the unique animal species of Aotearoa New Zealand through banking their genetic diversity.

Cryobanks, or frozen zoos are in use throughout the world to support conservation efforts for endangered species. Tāpui Aotearoa is working alongside iwi to establish how this might work effectively in New Zealand.

NEXT is committed to two years research into cryobanking along with other founding partners The Department of Conservation, New Zealand's Biological Heritage National Science Challenge, and Genomics Aotearoa.

Tāpui Aotearoa Project Lead Dr Libby Caygill says Aotearoa New Zealand has an extraordinary rich natural heritage with many endemic species found nowhere else in the world.

"These taonga, these treasures need to be protected for future generations. Preserving their genetic diversity through cryobanking is one way we can help protect them," she says.

"Preserving genetic and cellular material, such as DNA, eggs, sperm, or other live cells provides a store of genetic diversity that can potentially be used in future conservation breeding programmes. Adding back genetic diversity to a population can help maintain healthy and resilient populations of our irreplaceable New Zealand animals.

"Aotearoa New Zealand is unique in that tangata whenua are the kaitiaki of taonga species. Research practices involving these species must recognise and provide for mana whenua rights and interests. The long-term success of a fauna

cryobank in Aotearoa is dependent on building partnerships with iwi and hapū that embed the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) and mātauranga Māori throughout the design and implementation of the project."

"Tāpui Aotearoa is working with iwi and hapū, conservationists, and genetic experts to investigate cryopreservation options for our unique species. The ultimate goal is to help protect the long-term survival of New Zealand's irreplaceable animal species."

NEXT environmental advisor Devon McLean says Tāpui Aotearoa aligns with NEXT's other environmental investments, which focus on protecting our biodiversity and supporting a Predator Free New Zealand.

"While conservation efforts in Aotearoa have reversed the decline of a number of species, many are still considered at risk and we don't know how they will respond to the increasing pressures of climate change," Devon says.

"Within a changing environment or when exposed to new diseases, predators, or competitors, our species need to have diverse healthy gene pools that allow them to adapt in order to survive.

"Cryobanking could be an important tool in the kit to preserve species and Tāpui Aotearoa will help us understand the protocols, intricacies and best practice so we can make the very best choices moving forward."