

NZ-VR Evaluation

Evaluation report on programme outcomes and learning to June 2019

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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

This report explores learning and outcomes from the NZ-VR initiative. NZ-VR is led by Blake and NZ Geo, with substantial funding for its development from Foundation North through its Gulf Innovation Fund Together (G.I.F.T.) initiative. A key focus of this report is on initial outcomes and learning from the schools piloting.

The vision of NZ-VR is to create an increased understanding of the marine environment, which viewers develop an emotional connection to, and a desire to take action. NZ-VR was formally launched by partners in mid-November 2018.

Uptake of NZ-VR

NZ-VR to date has engaged some 9,000 students at primary and secondary schools around Auckland; 20,000 students are expected to experience NZ-VR by the end of 2019.

Since launch, there have been over 740,000 video viewings via social media. There are over 32,000 unique views on the website app, with nearly 85,000 video viewings.

NZ-VR activity is currently led by Blake and NZ Geo, with some emerging participation by WWF, an iwi partner and growing interest elsewhere.

Student and teacher engagement with NZ-VR

Student feedback indicates that NZ-VR is providing an experience of the marine environment, that many had not been exposed to in their lives; this was notably higher among children and young people in lower decile schools.

Students are engaging with a wide range of themes, including sea life, human impacts on marine environments, and action to improve the health of marine environments.

A shift is evident among both primary and intermediate/secondary students of increased interest in protecting the marine environment, following engagement with NZ-VR.

Students are able to identify actions they can take to protect and enhance the marine environment.

Teachers agree that NZ-VR is a helpful tool to support education and action: Teachers overwhelmingly agreed (95%) that VR is a good way to support environmental education, and 82% 'generally' or 'strongly' agreed that NZ-VR inspired students to care for the environment. Almost all would recommend NZ-VR to colleagues.

Immediate uptake of teacher resources appears low but there are strong intentions signalled to make use of the school resources.

Factors that support engagement include the engaging content of NZ-VR that captures attention; the strengths of the educators; the appeal of the technology; and the strong link to the curriculum.

It was widely agreed that NZ-VR has an immersive and experiential nature that provides contact with marine environments for the first time for many students, and effectively contrasts healthy and polluted marine areas.

Few barriers to uptake or impact were identified; at this early stage it is the time and opportunity to integrate resources into existing lesson plans, or the timing of sessions when topics were already covered.

NZ-VR partnerships

The partnership between Blake and NZ Geo is critical to NZ-VR's success to date, which has built a broad platform of engagement on issues affecting the marine environment of the Hauraki Gulf.

Engagement with other organisations, including WWF and iwi, is slowly developing. Other funding and delivery partners are coming aboard which is likely to extend reach and impact.

The foundational funding from G.I.F.T. was critical for leveraging new funding and extending impact through new funding sourced through NZ On Air, NZ Lotteries Commission, Grassroots Trust, Hugo Foundation, WWF, Giltrap Group and other partners. Foundation North funding through GIFT enabled five sites in the Hauraki Gulf and Northland to be filmed for NZ-VR. Since then, NZ on Air and other funders have joined as a funding partner to support sites across the North Island, South Island, the Kermadecs, and sub-Antarctic Islands. In addition, funding from G.I.F.T, Lotteries and other partners that enabled Blake to run its schools programme in 2019, and its continued delivery and potential expansion in 2020.

G.I.F.T.'s support for innovative approaches allowed learning and adaptation of the technology and delivery, and supported highly innovative approaches to emerge.

Key learning and looking ahead

Promoting broad-based engagement with the marine environment complements the in-depth activity of the lead partners, and enables connection with the marine environment that is out of reach for many.

NZ-VR appears particularly valid in working with low decile schools and other populations that would struggle to experience the ocean otherwise. NZ-VR offers an important connection to place, which will be an important consideration for rollout elsewhere in New Zealand. In Auckland and Northland, the centrality of the Hauraki Gulf to the offering was part of the success of NZ-VR.

Looking ahead, there is a great deal of scope for its expansion to other schools and other populations within the Foundation North area, and more widely in New Zealand. An important consideration for future delivery will be how NZ-VR is scaled and the aim of future scaling; whether this is scaling out to a wider range of participants, or scaling up to influence changes in behaviours, systems, policies, and organisations to better protect the Hauraki Gulf and the wider marine environment.

To receive a copy of the full report, please get in touch with us at info@blake.nz.org. For more information please visit our website [blakenz.org](https://www.blakenz.org).