

# COMMERCIAL CONSERVATION

THE HEART OF OUR BUSINESS





# RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

## *An introduction from Gavin Oliver – Managing Director of EcoZip Adventures*

It's reasonable to claim that responsible tourism is baked into EcoZip's DNA. As founders and shareholders, Chris Hollister and I first envisaged a business conceived to conduct commercial conservation long before we landed on ziplines as the vehicle to deliver on this objective.

As friends, we shared a great passion for the outdoors, particularly hiking in New Zealand's beautiful backcountry. We talked frequently about how could we develop an experience that showcased everything we loved about New Zealand, the landscapes, the native forests and the crazy Kiwi sense of adventure, whilst simultaneously protecting this incredible environment for generations to come. We concluded that ziplines were the perfect solution, and could be used to demonstrate how business and conservation can naturally co-exist.

From the outset, two principles, and one big question, have guided our approach to business: 'Good things happen to companies that do good things'; 'Business needs to be about more than just profit'; and 'What kind of legacy do we want to leave for our kids?'. More than a decade since EcoZip was founded, we're proud we've been guided by, and built upon, those principles.

Today, EcoZip Adventures has become a multi-award-winning adventure and eco-tourism business. It's founded on what we first called 'commercial conservation' and is, today, a sound and successful business, able to fund conservation projects and social initiatives that benefit people, communities and the planet.



Gavin Oliver

*Commercial Conservation was a phrase coined by EcoZip's founders, Gavin Oliver and Chris Hollister. Today akin to 'sustainable tourism', for Gavin and Chris, this phrase articulated their aspiration to use a regular, for-profit, business to deliberately and proactively fund conservation, social and environmental outcomes in the course of normal day-to-day operations.*



Gavin Oliver



Chris Hollister



## **EcoZip Adventures HQ - Waiheke Island, Auckland, New Zealand**



# ECOZIP ADVENTURES NEW ZEALAND

## *Responsible Tourism*

EcoZip Adventures is an eco- and adventure tourism company with operations on Waiheke Island, in New Zealand's North Island, and Kaikōura in the South Island. The core of the business is award winning, premium, zipline and native forest experiences, which have been developed to stimulate positive environmental and social impacts with each and every visitor.

The business is run by a dedicated and passionate team, and we hold ourselves to a series of 'pillars' that are the ethical blueprint for everything we do. From the inception of the business, we've believed that commercialism and conservation can go hand-in-hand. Over the past 12-years, and thanks to the success of the business, we've invested 10's of thousands of dollars and immeasurable manhours in projects and initiatives that support, protect and sustain our people, our community and the beautiful, natural taonga that is our home.

Our original mission statement, or vision, was to 'get visitors off tour buses and out into the bush'. Since 2012 we've achieved that with hundreds of thousands of visitors who, in enjoying the EcoZip experience, have made possible the preservation of once threatened swathes of native, remnant rainforest and funded innumerable other projects that

reflect our commitment to not just sustainable but regenerative tourism.

That original mission statement has developed significantly and today reflects that we're not just in adventure tourism, we're as much in education. Visitors to EcoZip learn the value of NZ's natural landscape, they learn why its protection is important to them and how they can embrace the principles of Kaitiakitanga.

We seek to educate our peers by leading by example, and by demonstrating that a shift to a regenerative business model can be rewarding, enjoyable and crucially, profitable.

### ***Taonga***

is Māori for treasure, or something prized.

### ***Kaitiakitanga***

is Māori for the concept of guardianship of the sky, the sea, and the land. A kaitiaki is a guardian, and the process and practices of protecting and looking after the environment are referred to as kaitiakitanga.

***EcoZip Adventures Kaikōura, New Zealand***





# KAITIAKITANGA

## *For our Future Generations*

Kaitiakitanga is a Māori concept that means guardianship and protection of the natural environment and its resources. It recognises that we're all merely nature's custodians, or Kaitiaki, temporarily in charge and bearing ultimate responsibility for how we hand-on the land, air and seas to future generations.

Underpinning our business is a document entitled **The Pillars of Responsibility**, it's 'the pillars' that define how we operate, and influences all our major decision-making. They enshrine our commitment to act ethically, consciously and sustainably in all our business dealings, operations and undertakings.

With the **Pillars of Responsibility** as our business blueprint, we commit that we will:

- ▶ Conduct, fund and facilitate the restoration, replenishment and regeneration of the forest of which we are the Kaitiaki and the wider natural taonga in our areas of operation.
- ▶ Act proactively, both directly and in partnerships with others, to protect our native fauna and flora from introduced pests and predators.
- ▶ Think, work and buy locally, with an emphasis on sustainability, to support our local economy.
- ▶ Champion, and encourage our peers and associates to join us in, the development of business models which will reflect best practise in sphere of Regenerative Tourism.
- ▶ Give preference of employment to locals, we will develop career pathways for our people and will always act as a fair and reasonable employer, and a business of which our local community may be proud.
- ▶ Pay a fair wage, reward endeavour, encourage innovation and ensure our people benefit directly, and financially, from the company's success.
- ▶ Develop means of encouraging our visitors to stay longer, to do more and to engage more widely, so benefiting our community.
- ▶ Help our visitors to discover the value of Aotearoa New Zealand's natural landscape, to understand why its protection is important to them and how they too can embrace the precepts of Kaitiakitanga.
- ▶ Proactively fund and develop opportunities to offer time and financial support to initiatives and causes that better the lives of Kiwi kids, in both our local and wider communities.



**EcoZip Waiheke**

***“We are proud to be judged not upon what we say,  
but upon what we do”***





Toitū te Marae o Tane,  
Toitū te Marae o Tangaroa,  
Toitū te Iwi

Protect and strengthen the  
realms of the Land and Sea,  
and they will protect and  
strengthen the People.



EcoZip Waiheke

## PROTECT

### Weed & Pest Eradication

Our original Waiheke location spans 21-hectares, covered largely with coastal remnant rainforest, parts of which are up to 700-years old. Although an officially recognised *Site of Environmental Significance*, it had been abandoned for years, resulting in the forest being suffocated with invasive weeds, while introduced predators, notably rats and stoats, had decimated the once abundant native wildlife. Upon acquiring the land in 2012 we implemented weed eradication, pest control and forest rehabilitation programmes, funded through income from the business. Subsequently thousands of hours have been invested by our guides, and by specialist experts, who've thrown themselves into the role of kaitiaki, or guardians, with unbridled enthusiasm.

Today, the weeds that once choked the site from forest floor to canopy have gone. Our ongoing control programme ensures weeds are no longer competing with native trees and plants for nutrients, water, and light, which can stunt the growth of saplings and trees. As the weeds have been removed, we've been able to plant thousands of eco-sourced native trees, pursuing our aim to restore the forest to how it would have looked prior to European colonisation of New Zealand.

The introduction of a pest control programme, with traps every 50m<sup>2</sup>, has resulted in a previously inconceivable decrease in predator numbers. Measured as *Predator Density Per Hectare*, numbers have plummeted since 2012, leaving our forest near predator-free. Today, the forest, which was once eerily silent, now rings with birdsong. As a result of systematic weed eradication, native tree restoration and predator control, the biodiversity of our ancient, stately, forest has exploded, and our visitors, to their delight, now routinely share their experience with noisy native birds and shy reptiles.

At our new Kaikōura location, which opened in December 2023, we're fast-tracking a programme across the 1200-hectare site to start dealing with introduced predators, notably possums and feral cats. Trap lines, established before we opened to the public, are already yielding results and a survey of *Predator Density Per Hectare*, funded by EcoZip, will commence shortly. Simultaneously, a weed audit, undertaken late in 2023, is now driving a weed control and native tree reforestation programme.

At both Waiheke and Kaikōura, the work of managing traps, removing weeds and planting native trees is undertaken by our team and, occasionally, specialist contractors. We receive no funding for these activities and the whole cost of these programmes, at both sites, is met from the revenue from our day-to-day operations, forming part of our pledge to restore and rebalance the ecology of our sites.

### Why Is Predator Control Important?

New Zealand is facing a major biodiversity crisis. Every year, an estimated 25 million native birds are killed by rats, stoats, possums and other predators. Without predator control, our forest health will decline further, and many more native animal populations will become extinct in less than two human generations.

### Why are weeds a problem?

Weeds can provide hiding places for pests, which creates a risk to our native bird species. Weeds can also carry diseases, alter the soil pH and use more water than native plant species.





# EDUCATE

## *Knowledge is Strength*

A visit to EcoZip Adventures is, we believe, our opportunity to educate our visitors on how they too can adopt the role of kaitiaki. Our belief is that if our visitors gain an understanding of how finely balanced is Aotearoa's ecology, they will leave with a deeper appreciation of this place and come to want to protect it as much as we do.

For example, when we explain to our guests that predators, such as rats, stoats, and possums, have led to the extinction of 52% of bird species on the North Island and 47% on the South Island, the effect is visceral. Inexorably, this gives rise to a discussion of how this alarming decline can be halted, and how our visitors can practically help to prevent further degradation of threatened species.

### ***Te Korowai o Waiheke***

Te Korowai o Waiheke is a local charitable trust dedicated to eradicating predators from Waiheke Island. The first stage of their project focuses on stoat eradication across the island. The second stage involves pilot trials to understand how to remove rats, with the ultimate goal of making Waiheke predator-free.

We believe in the importance of Te Korowai o Waiheke's work, which is why they are beneficiaries of our annual *Locals Day* fundraiser. Educating our team helps us inform our visitors, so we encourage groups like Te Korowai o Waiheke to share the details of their efforts. Their time in educating our team, further enriches our knowledge, which helps our mission to educate and inform our visitors.



***‘Nā te mahi ngātahi, ka tau te  
kuaka ki tōnā tauranga’  
‘When we work together, like the  
godwit we can reach our  
destination no matter the distance’***





# RESTORE

## Native Tree Planting & Carbon Offsetting

With our emphasis on regenerative tourism, we have developed a way to easily allow our clients to themselves become Kaitiaki, or guardians. For only \$5, our guests can donate an eco-sourced native tree which, while also offsetting their ferry or vehicle transport emissions, will be helping to restore ecosystems in and around our operating sites. These trees will still be standing in hundreds, if not thousands, of years; sequestering carbon and providing vital habitat for NZ's native wildlife.

When first introduced at our Waiheke site in 2019, customer enthusiasm for this programme proved so great that we quickly ran out of space to plant the donated trees. This has allowed us to partner with other organisations to donate trees, helping to restore wetlands, and reinstate native forest, around the island.

At beautiful Rakanui Station, a 1200-hectare, working hill-farm set 15 minutes south of Kaikōura, our regenerative mission begins again, albeit from a very different starting point. Rakanui is made up of pockets of native forest, open pasture, and steep hillsides and gullies, which have been overrun by dense scrub weeds like gorse and broom.

Due for completion in November 2023 on Rakanui Station is a new, EcoZip built and funded, native tree nursery. Featuring a purpose-built, 60m<sup>2</sup> planting and propagation centre, our new nursery will be capable of producing thousands of trees annually. These trees will be used, once weeds are removed, to restore farmland to native forest. They will also be gifted to community and not-for-profit groups for local regeneration projects.



### Ecozip donates \$8000 of trees to WRT

Managing director of EcoZip, Gavin Oliver, is donating \$8000 to Waiheke Resources Trust to purchase 1400 native trees for wetland planting, despite the past 12 months being "tortuous" for the adventure tourism company.

Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, Gavin says 70 percent of customers were international visitors and the big priority this past year has been keeping his staff in jobs.

"There's no playbook for this. I've run my own companies for more than 20 years and I've never had a time as hard as the past 12 months."

Back in March 2019, Gavin says EcoZip made a commitment to support Waiheke Resources Trust's native tree planting initiative, promising to match donations made by customers.

He switched on an ability to add trees to the company's online booking engine that gave customers the option of adding "support native trees" to their basket when they booked a zipline ride.

"We got our first donation within an hour," says Gavin. Donations also came through a simple perspex pot sitting



EcoZip's Gavin Oliver plants native trees ahead of Arbor and World Environment Day.

on EcoZip's front counter. But then the borders closed.

"When we got to the end of this financial year, it was not as much as we had hoped to raise over this period," he says. "But there was never a point where we thought

"let's not do this."

"The environment still needs our help urgently and that's regardless of a pandemic bringing the world to its knees."

With Arbor Day and World Environment Day taking place this Saturday 5 June, Gavin says his real hope is that other businesses will be motivated to start something similar.

The trees paid for by EcoZip's donation are grown from seed gathered on Waiheke and sourced from Gulf Trees and Waiheke Native Plants Trees.

Waiheke Resources Trust general manager Mike Maabs says the trees will be planted into ecosystems that filter water, trap sediment, absorb carbon from the atmosphere and are home to critically endangered and endemic wildlife.

"In Aotearoa New Zealand, only 10 percent of wetlands remain due to drainage and degradation from development and agriculture. Regeneration of wetlands is a step towards providing a future for

our endangered species of birds and fish, combating climate change and providing clean and safe waterways for recreation. We have a lot to gain from bringing the trees back to Waiheke's wetlands," Mike says. • Erin Johnson

### The BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal)

Our aim is to grow and plant, or donate, a native tree for every guest who zips with EcoZip, which we forecast will require us to ultimately raise over 50,000 trees and plants annually. Massive, legacy projects such as are only possible because of the partnership we have with our clients; without their participation our BHAG would be just a dream.

At both Kaikōura and Waiheke, we work with corporate, educational and tourism groups to offer planting opportunities as part of 'voluntourism' programmes. These programmes provide a means for our clients to participate in the restoration process and so become guardians or kaitiaki. With our new Project Tanē initiative, this process is about to become supercharged.

Beyond our direct environmental and conservation initiatives, we also measure our carbon emissions, tracking everything from employee commuting to wastewater output. Working with a professional, 3rd party audit partner, we offset 120% of our carbon emissions taking us beyond being merely Carbon Neutral to actually Carbon Positive. Our carbon credits are then sourced from projects that grow and protect indigenous forests in NZ and the Pacific to deliver climate resilience, waterway protection, biodiversity conservation and community economic development.





# ENVIRONMENT

## Sustainability Commitment

We are proud to be acknowledged as an advocate for sustainable and regenerative tourism. In 2021, our commitment to environmental and regenerative tourism initiatives was recognised with a Qualmark 100% Pure New Zealand award; one of only 12 ever awarded. We've also been profiled as an ardent champion of the Tourism Sustainability Commitment.

We use our work as a vehicle to educate our clients, explaining how they too can adopt the role of kaitiaki and how they can participate in the protection of New Zealand's natural environment. We attract staff with an interest in sustainability and environmentalism, largely due to our unconcealed commitment to regenerative and environmentally centric business practises.

While delivering a tangible restoration of our own forest, we've been able to also support the community, and the wider environment, on Waiheke Island. We've done this with significant native tree donations to groups like Waiheke Resources Trust, a not-for-profit organisation, working to restore wetlands around Waiheke. In 2023 we approached the Trustees of the Friends of McKenzie Reserve, a community lead group who have poured over 12,000 volunteer-hours, and over 15,000 native trees, into restoring a former 10-ha pine plantation, and offering to fund all their tree planting, track repairs and weed eradication for the next year.



## Project Tāne

In Māori mythology, Tāne-mahuta is the god of the forest and birds and represents a very significant cultural icon. Tāne is a model for action in the world; seen as upright and able to bear the weight of a great enterprise. Trees in the forest are seen as Tāne-mahuta, and Tāne, the tree, holds the sky aloft, bringing light into the world.

From 2025, Project Tāne will be a formal extension of a process that started, informally, in 2018. Then, working with partners, EcoZip began welcoming educational and corporate groups who wished, in addition to ziplining, to get involved in practical conservation or environmental activities. This has led to thousands of trees, funded by EcoZip, being planted in Waiheke's wetlands.

Project Tāne isn't intended to replace this activity but rather offer an alternative or extension. Organisations, like companies, schools or universities, tour operators or cruise lines, can 'adopt' a parcel of land in Kaikōura which will be prepared for planting. Using trees funded by EcoZip, the organisation's clients, staff or volunteers will plant trees within their parcel, which will be named after the organisation. Each year, as the organisation's customers, personnel or volunteers return, they'll witness the incremental growth of their efforts.

This partnership with EcoZip will allow the organisation, and their people, to follow the growth of their forest, as it expands and creates a lifelong legacy both for the organisation and the people who've planted the trees.





# SUPPORT

## Caring for the Community

Engaging with, and supporting, causes that are important to the community is something we've done since we were inspired to start the business. Our community engagement programme is deliberately diverse, it's objective is to support all facets of the community - social, environmental, cultural and economic - providing leadership, advocacy and backing; both financial and in-kind.

**Locals Day** - Annually, since 2019, we've offered a Locals Day, which allows members of our community to zip at significantly reduced prices, with all the day's revenue divided amongst three local charities, which are suggested by the community. This initiative annually sees thousands of dollars divided amongst grass-root charity and community groups, backing work in fields such as native bird rescue, care for domestic violence victims, medical support for sick children and their care givers, and much more.

**Children's Charities** - Since 2016 we've supported a number of charities dedicated to improving the lives of ordinary Kiwi kids. We've done this with the gift of days out at EcoZip for kids who, due to financial, medical or other social constraints, could probably never hope to ride on a ferry, let alone participate in a zipline experience. To do this we've worked with charities such as Variety, Big Buddy and The Kiwi Kids Charity. These days are, arguably, the best day at work (ever) for the whole EcoZip team and it hard to state who gets more from this, us or the children we support!

In an extension to this programme, we're now the principal sponsor of the Kaikoura Adventure Race, a community inspired and led enterprise that directly supports local schools, plus local charity and community groups.

**Scholarships** - In 2023 we introduced the EcoZip Adventures Tourism Scholarship. This programme, run in collaboration with a tertiary training institution, provides a North and South Island scholarship. Aimed at low decile schools, populated by students who could rarely afford not to enter the workforce at the end of year 12 or 13, it provides funding for their ongoing education, resulting in a formal Diploma in Adventure Tourism Management.

2023 WINNER  
TOURISM INDUSTRY NEW ZEALAND TRUST  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARD  
NEW ZEALAND  
TOURISM  
AWARDS



EcoZip Adventures

*"Without our wonderful visitors, these special days or donations would not be possible. So, when our guests fly down our ziplines, we remind them that they're not just having fun, they're also helping the Tamariki of Aotearoa (children of New Zealand)"*

Tripadvisor  
Travelers'  
Choice Awards



2024



Gulf News, 29 June 2023

KAWEPURONGO / NEWS

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## Ecozip's Locals' Day raises \$7000 for children's charities

Two charities will each receive a \$3500 boost thanks to Ecozip Adventures' second 'Locals' Day'.

More than 150 Waiheke residents attended the annual event at a special discounted rate, raising \$7000 for the Kiwi Kids Charity and the Jassy Dean Trust.

"Both of these charities are truly deserving and we're thrilled to be able to lend a hand supporting their initiatives," says Ecozip Adventures CEO and

co-founder Gavin Oliver.

Jassy Dean Trust founder Greg Dean says the trust is "so incredibly grateful to Ecozip for their donation. The funds raised will go directly towards providing support to kids on Waiheke with health needs, including ferry tickets for hospital appointments, ambulance fees, specialist appointments, cash grants for hospital stays, medication, equipment, therapy, counselling and much more".

The chair of the Kiwi Kids Charity, Dana Cocks, also thanked Ecozip. "When Ecozip are already doing such a great thing for their community, just by having the event, to then donate the proceeds on top of that is truly generous."

Kiwi Kids helps children, schools and families whose unique needs mean they often aren't eligible for funding or support through other charities or organisations.

"We believe in helping kids in our own backyard first and the money gifted to us today will help us do just that," she says.

• Silvia Masua



Heading out in parties of 10 during the course of the day, over 150 Waiheke Island residents supported Ecozip's 2023 Locals Day charity initiative.

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