



Tiakina te Taiao Newsletter - October 2025

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Tiakina te Taiao Newsletter October 2025

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Sustainability must also mean wellbeing

In recent months, Aotearoa New Zealand's campuses have felt the force of climate in alarming ways – from storm-level winds that closed universities in Christchurch and disrupted flight in Wellington to winter floods that swept through Nelson, Tasman, and Marlborough. These are not isolated events but reminders that the realities of climate change are already disrupting our sector

and the communities we serve. For tertiary education, this highlights not only the urgency of ambitious climate targets, but also the responsibility to ensure that climate action strengthens, rather than undermines, the wellbeing of staff and students.

At the same time, it is important to note that climate research and policy are not solely stories of crisis. A significant development is the launch of the Nature Relationship Index, a new global tool that measures how human wellbeing and ecological health can thrive together. By moving beyond narrow metrics like GDP or emissions alone, it offers a more hopeful and constructive framework – one that aligns closely with the values of tertiary education in building resilient, sustainable futures. Read on to find out more.

Also in this newsletter, Tiakina te Taiao Advisory Group member Eziaku Rasheed argues we must not forget the people inside our “greener” campuses. Climate strategies that succeed on paper can still leave staff working in offices that are uncomfortably hot, poorly ventilated, or overcrowded. Granular data – capturing the daily fluctuations in air quality, temperature, and interruptions – reveals how these conditions directly affect health, concentration, and productivity in ways that averages disguise. The lesson is clear: climate action and staff wellbeing are not in conflict. A truly sustainable tertiary system is one where campuses are both low-carbon and healthy places to work and learn.

Help us document climate impacts on campus

Tiakina te Taiao is creating a photo archive to capture how climate change is affecting the tertiary sector. If you have images of climate-related damage at your workplace, or examples of adaptation measures such as flood protection or other resilience initiatives, we'd like to include them in our database. With your permission, these photos may be shared in newsletters and research reports to strengthen our collective voice. Please let us know when and where the images were taken – before-and-after shots are especially valuable.

Please send your photos to jared.commerer@teu.ac.nz

Upcoming Network Meeting – Tuesday 21 October

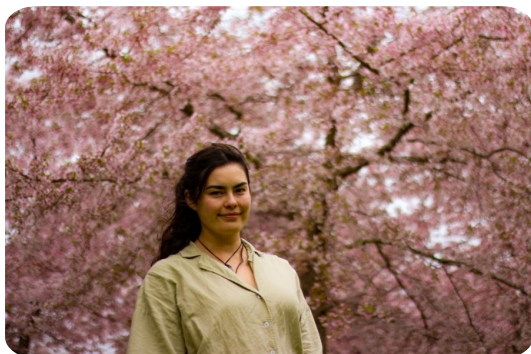
We look forward to connecting at our October network meeting. We will be joined by Summer Wright who will discuss her work with OraTaiao.

Date: Tuesday 21 October

Time: 12-1pm

Agenda:

1. Summer Wright on OraTaiao
2. Network workplan update
3. Further business



Summer Rangimaarie Wright (Ngāti Maniapoto) is Convenor of OraTaiao: Aotearoa NZ Climate & Health Council. OraTaiao is a not-for-profit, politically non-partisan incorporated society of health workers, advocating for climate justice. Summer will discuss the upcoming priorities of OraTaiao, which going into the 2026 general election include being a strong voice for collective power and health, in a time of boldfaced corporate influence in public policy.

Eziaku Rasheed: Why granular data matters for staff comfort and productivity

“A campus can look green on paper, but if staff are uncomfortable or paying hidden costs, climate action has failed its people.”

Universities are racing towards ambitious climate targets, with net zero by 2030 now the common goal. This is urgent work, but in the rush to cut emissions we must not forget the people who make our universities function – the staff.

Most climate strategies focus on energy, buildings, and travel. What they rarely consider is how these changes affect those of us working inside those buildings, or whether hidden costs are being shifted onto staff. A campus can look “green” on paper while being uncomfortable or unhealthy in reality.

Research shows that indoor environmental quality (IEQ) – temperature, ventilation, and air quality – has direct effects on staff health, wellbeing, and productivity. The problem is that IEQ is usually measured with averages, such as yearly temperature or air-quality scores. Averages hide the daily fluctuations that staff actually feel. Granular, high-resolution data gives a truer picture.

What granular research reveals

- **Crowding and sharing matter:** Comfort and productivity drop as more people share space. Smaller or private offices report better outcomes, while shared offices often record higher CO₂, reducing concentration and decision-making ([Khoshbakht et al., 2021a](#); [Rasheed et al., 2019](#)).
- **Interruptions drain performance:** Frequent interruptions lower self-rated productivity across different office types ([Khoshbakht et al., 2021b](#)).
- **Work hours matter:** Staff working 8+ hours daily report more problems with air quality and less control over temperature ([Shao, 2022](#)).
- **Satisfaction isn't simple:** Even when conditions meet standards, many staff remain dissatisfied, especially with temperature control and ventilation ([Byrd & Rasheed, 2016](#)).
- **Averages can mislead:** Annual readings may look acceptable, but individual offices often exceed healthy limits ([Rasheed et al., 2024](#)).
- **Comments reveal hidden issues:** Staff comments frequently contradict survey tick-boxes, exposing operational problems missed by standard reporting ([Rasheed et al., 2024](#)).
- **What workers want:** Staff consistently prefer more fresh air, mixed-mode ventilation, and lighting they can control – evidence that “green” must also mean comfortable ([Rasheed & Rotimi, 2024](#)).

Why this matters

If universities rely only on average data, they risk missing serious problems that undermine staff wellbeing. Climate action should not result in offices that are efficient on paper but uncomfortable, unhealthy, or more expensive for staff to occupy.

Bottom line

Climate action and staff wellbeing are not in conflict. Universities can meet their carbon goals while ensuring healthy, comfortable, and productive workplaces. The key is to measure what staff actually experience – not just what the averages say.

The Nature Relationship Index

A new global initiative – the Nature Relationship Index – has been proposed to complement the Human Development Index by tracking whether people and ecosystems can truly thrive together. Developed through a collaboration led by the UN Development Programme and scientists from the Stockholm Resilience Centre and elsewhere, the Index will assess how countries manage natural resources, protect ecosystems, and ensure access to healthy nature. As a positive development, it shifts climate and sustainability metrics beyond emissions and GDP, injecting more nuance into how success is measured – and offering a powerful tool for institutions that want to align human wellbeing,

ecological health, and long-term resilience.

Read more about this development by visiting the [Stockholm Resilience Centre](#).

Call for Expressions of Interest: TEU Climate Action Delegates

Tiakina te Taiao's primary objective for 2024-2025 is to establish Climate Action Delegates at each TEU branch.

Our Climate Action Delegates work to ensure a tertiary education sector that is actively contributing to a just and sustainable future through high-quality research, teaching, and institutional leadership, as well as the provision of exemplary working conditions.

For more information about what our Climate Action Delegates do, [see our flyer](#).

To express an interest in becoming a TEU Climate Action Delegate, please contact jared.commerer@teu.ac.nz

Webinar: Living Through Climate Disasters – How Communities Reimagine Recovery and Preparedness

The Centre for Sustainability Research and He Kaupapa Hononga are hosting a webinar with Dr Elise Remling (University of Canberra) on her research with communities impacted by climate disasters. Details below.

- **When:** Wednesday 22 October, 12-1pm
- **Where:** Physics Seminar Room 314, Science III Building, 730 Cumberland Street North, Dunedin
- **Zoom:** <https://otago.zoom.us/j/97964601170?pwd=UCt2U2pWQk9EUnNHc2tJaXc0ZlBxUT09%3Chttps://otago.zoom.us/j/97964601170?pwd=UCt2U2pWQk9EUnNHc2tJaXc0ZlBxUT09%3E>
- **Zoom Password:** 532120

Abstract: This talk presents findings from two ongoing research projects exploring how we live with climate-driven disasters in an era of increasing risk. Both projects are informed by lived-experience research approaches, with the researcher embedded within the communities being studied. When extreme

events devastate communities, what happens next? How do people rebuild not just their homes, but their relationship with the environment itself? How do they imagine the future? And how can we better empower communities to prepare for the climate disasters we know are coming?

About the speaker: Dr Elise Remling is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Environmental Governance, University of Canberra, Australia, specialising in environmental social science research on climate impacts, disaster risk, and community resilience. Her work integrates disaster research with climate adaptation, focusing on the human dimensions of extreme events and community-based preparedness approaches.

Watch: Leading for Those Not Yet Born – Tools for Long-term Policymaking

On Wednesday 8 October Hāpai Public and the School of Government, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington hosted Jacob Ellis, Co-Lead and Founder of the Impact Coalition for Future Generations in Wales. Jacob discussed how decisions of public servants shape the world for generations to come.

View the full recording [here](#).

Items of interest

- [New Zealand summers set to sizzle: New research predicts more heatwaves coming by 2025](#) (Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato | University of Waikato)
- [Explainer: What is 'climate anxiety'?](#) (CarbonBrief)
- [Factcheck: Trump's climate report includes more than 100 false or misleading claims](#) (CarbonBrief)
- [Government resets 2050 biogenic methane target](#) (Ministry for the Environment)
- [New Zealand accused of 'full-blown climate denial' over cuts to methane reduction targets](#) (The Guardian)

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