



Judges' Report

CATEGORY:

Marine

Envirohub Marlborough Litter Intelligence

INTERVIEWED

Ailie Suzuki

DATE

6 December 2024

JUDGES

Phil Bradfield (Coordinating Judge), Eric Jorgensen, and Oliver Wade

THE PROJECT

2018 by Sustainable Coastlines in conjunction with Stats NZ and the Department of Conservation (and funded by the Ministry for the Environment). With restructures and loss of funds, Sustainable Coastlines have not been able to continue leading this project in Marlborough and so Envirohub Marlborough has stepped up and is currently ensuring the continuation of this project in the region.

Recently, with the assistance of Marlborough District Council and through collaboration with EnviroSchools, Envirohub has created a new programme around the Litter Intelligence project that now supports and uplifts students of all ages, from primary to high by allowing all students to benefit from and have the opportunity to participate in Litter Intelligence.



MAIN ISSUE/CHALLENGE

In the past, the burden of being a part of the Litter Intelligence project would fall upon a single teacher and their class. This included running four surveys and audits per year. Often, that teacher would either end up overburdened or would leave the school and the site would go dormant. To take this pressure off teachers, and to allow for all students in Marlborough to potentially take part, Envirohub Marlborough now offers this project to schools in Marlborough.

SOLUTION

By taking the lead, Envirohub ensures sites remain active and are audited regularly, from the Picton foreshore to Ngākuta Bay to as far as Long Island in the Marlborough Sounds -Hamote/Long Island Marine Reserve, in Tōtaranui/Queen Charlotte Sound, Rarangi and beyond. In addition Envirohub supports teachers and allows for any class at any school or educational group to take part.

In addition, Envirohub also has the ability to train new Lead Citizen Scientists that can lead their own groups, and continues to support their work if required, thus further empowering local communities and expanding the number of sites monitored regularly.

GENERAL INFORMATION

This project gives students (from 5 years of age to 18+) the opportunity to be outdoors and help clean up our coastlines. In addition, by taking part in the surveys and audits they participate in a national project with strict guidelines and rules, ensuring the validity of the data collected. The students audit every piece of rubbish that is collected in the survey area, which gives new insight into the types of rubbish and the potential problematic litter sources. Furthermore, the data collected has mathematical and analytical applications for the students back in the classroom. All data from each and every site monitored around the country (and beyond into the Pacific Islands!) is fully accessible at all times and data can be viewed to pick up trends and patterns over time.



This carefully curated data also has the ability to fight and change policy and has been used to report back internationally to the Sustainable Development Goals. This played an important part in the banning of plastic bags and plastic items in recent years and continues to play a part in national policy and the addressing of litter in our oceans and on our shores. As such the students are empowered by showing them that a simple local task can have huge implications on a national and global stage and that they are having an impact!

Envirohub Marlborough is proud to support schools and educational groups in the Marlborough community and to continue the longevity of this project in Marlborough, while cleaning up our coastlines, monitoring the litter collected and driving social and behavioural changes to reduce the litter that ends up on our shores and in our landfills.

WHERE IS IT?/WHO IS INVOLVED?

This project is currently run by Envirohub from their Picton base. There are 1.5 FTEs that run a host of Environmental/Conservation based projects of which Litter Intelligence is only a small part. These staff liaise and work with staff from Enviroschools in Marlborough by carrying out training programmes and also accompanying groups to some of the sites. Their focus has been on establishing the programme, with a particular focus on working with rural schools who don't get the same opportunities for field trips in the Marine environment.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Each Litter Intelligence site gets visited quarterly by a prearranged school group, where the site is marked, litter collected, sorted and categorised and then this data is entered into the national database for the site. Schools currently involved are Queen Charlotte College, Linkwater, Marlborough Girls College and Marlborough Boys College. Envirohub staff have been training these young people and now they are able to carry out this work with minimal Envirohub input. The field trips are well supported by these Enviroschools and also Marlborough District Council and the Department of Conservation.

THE JUDGES WERE IMPRESSED BY

- The passion of the key players to keep this project going.
- Staff motivation is high and is driven by "getting kids out there in the natural world, as many kids would otherwise never get the opportunity to get out on the water" and giving them the opportunity to explore and learn about our coastlines.
- We also heard that it was especially rewarding "watching kids start to notice patterns in the natural world and ignite a spark of interest and engagement in the project."
- Staff and teachers have been "opening students' eyes and initiating conversations about litter and especially the microplastics problem and having discussions about how they can "fix it"".
- Staff and teachers having conversations with students about biosecurity and the importance of carrying out Island Biosecurity Quarantine checks before arriving at some of our special island sanctuaries.
- How much has been achieved with such limited resources.



PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

Envirohub Marlborough has been involved in the Litter Intelligence project for many years, however, their impact and reach in supporting the programme and facilitating the expansion has been challenging due to their limited capacity with a small team working in other core areas, not just in the marine space. For a long time, Envirohub Marlborough was run primarily with volunteers but since sourcing funding and establishing social enterprise avenues and paying staff to drive the mahi, they have grown and expanded their reach and impact within the community.

They found that to increase capacity in the Litter Intelligence space, they needed to have a staff member that was driving this project. By building their reputation, trust and relationships with other groups, educational institutions, organisations and members of the Marlborough community, they were able to source funding to hire a staff member to drive this project with the support and help of Marlborough District Council and the Enviroschools team. This has now allowed them to actively support and expand the project. By working with multiple schools and year levels, they have also partly solved the issue of longevity of the programme by ensuring students who invest themselves in the programme at a younger year level, can continue to be a part of the programme as they progress to a higher year level at a new school. The more students they work with and train and the more teachers and schools/educational groups (including the homeschool community) they build relationships with, bodes well for the longevity of the project.

Some of the other challenges that Envirohub faces are having enough kits for field trips, so that all participants can be directly involved in the research on each trip. In addition, it can sometimes be a challenge arranging transport to some of the more remote sites, with organisers needing to juggle fluctuating tides, prevailing weather and boat capacity.

SUMMARY

Overall, we were impressed by the passion of the staff in taking on this challenging and relatively complex project. We think that this project is creating an important environmental spark in young people's minds and especially empowering them with the tools to study environmental problems and discussions relating to environmental solutions. We liked their thinking about showing young people that they can make a difference and contribute collectively to sound environmental thinking and practice. This project openly discusses "eco-anxiety" and focuses on positive steps to counter this.

We also think that it is incredibly important to get as many young people out in the natural world, as it is good not only for their individual wellbeing as well as helping them understand more about how complex and fragile the natural world is, and what they can do to contribute to making their future brighter.



SUGGESTIONS

To ensure longevity of this important work/project we suggest the following;

- That Litter Intelligence in Marlborough needs a robust long-term vision and strategy. This needn't be overly complex but a simple guiding document that charts the next 10 years' goals and actions to achieve these goals.
- Ensure that the current litter sites are done well before trying to increase the number of sites, which might potentially jeopardize the project.
- We suggest developing stronger relationships with other parties; suggestion includes local iwi organisations and businesses involved in the marine environment (especially the aquaculture industry, including local manufacturers of items used in the industry).
- The project is currently run on a very limited budget and every effort should be made to secure greater and more secure sources of funding.