

## **Read full Q & A with Surveyor / Environmental and Innovation Lead, Cuttriss, Ryan McNie,**

Cuttriss are experts in land surveying, engineering and planning, with over 75 years' experience in the Greater Wellington region. The team answer the hard questions about sustainability for their business.

### **Q: Tell us a little bit about your sustainability journey as a planning business?**

**A:** At Cuttriss, our commitment to sustainability is deeply rooted in our core purpose statement: "Positively influencing our environment by design." We know that the projects we undertake today shape the world of tomorrow and will leave a legacy for future generations. We want that legacy to be a positive one, and one that we can look back proudly on, so we need to make sure that our purpose is not just empty words but is reinforced by our actions.

We also employ several talented young professionals who are increasingly aware of the impact humans have on the environment. They look for employment opportunities where their values align with those of the potential employer so aligning the direction of our company with these values helps to attract the best talent.

In addition, we work with central and local government organisations who are increasingly aware of the sustainability impacts of the companies they work with, so it is important that we have the evidence to support the work we are doing in the sustainability space.

Although we may not be a major carbon emitter, we can still be leaders in this space and can choose to be more sustainable in our business practices. Our choice to partner with [Toitū for Carbon Zero Certification](#) was driven by their reputation for genuine impact and accountability. The journey with them, while initially challenging due to our lack of in-house experience, became more streamlined thanks to their exceptional support. The first year doing it was much harder than the subsequent year as it was all new and we didn't have anyone with that experience in the company. Fortunately, the account manager that we were dealing with answered all our questions well and in a timely manner, even setting up Teams meetings to make it easier to get the information through.

### **Q: Explain your process as a business, how do you research, explore and make decisions about the sustainability initiatives that you could implement as planners?**

**A:** In 2021, Cuttriss created the Environmental and Innovation Lead role, who's scope is to review ways to improve our environmental impact and implement those plans. This position embodies our dedication to continual research and exploration of ways to reduce our environmental footprint. Every initiative is run past the directors to ensure the decisions are in line with the company's vision, and that resources are available for those plans.

While our sustainability initiatives are largely intrinsic, we have found that if we present our clients with an option that is competitively priced and better for the environment, they will be more than happy to go for the environmental option.

At the Director level, purchasing decisions are made with a view to reduce our carbon impact.

We are actively working with our clients to provide modern medium and high-density housing opportunities in the areas of our towns and cities with good connections to public transport. Not only does this promote efficient land use but also aids in reducing transportation emissions. Through recent changes to the District Plans, higher densities in these areas are now more achievable, and we contributed to the plan change process in support of these changes. Creating new homes in the right places is one way we can have a positive impact on the transition to a low-carbon economy.

**Q: Why is sustainability important to you as a business? Why do you think it is important for Kāpiti?**

A: Sustainability is important to us as a business because we operate in the natural environment which is under increasing pressure. We can play a significant role in providing climate resilient housing for our current and future communities, in a way that protects and enhances environmental outcomes.

From a business perspective, embracing sustainability isn't just the right thing to do; we see it as smart strategy. Our sustainability initiatives have opened doors with potential clients and employees who value sustainability when making decisions. Councils in particular are facing increasing challenges due to aging infrastructure which is impacted by climate change. We are keen to be part of the solution.

Sustainability is important for Kāpiti as we live in such a naturally beautiful place. The community wants to know that this will be there for their children and mokopuna in the future. Through projects such as [Takutai Kāpiti](#), climate resilience has been at front of mind for many residents who may be impacted by coastal erosion and increased flooding due to climate change. There have also been an increasing number of natural disasters in recent times, which brings the issue to life.

**Q: Do you have a formal business sustainability policy?**

A: Cuttriss do not have a formal business sustainability policy, however with the Toitū certification, there are sections that hold us accountable to what we are doing.

For example: "This report helps Cuttriss to take responsibility for the carbon footprint which is created from our actions as a company. By empirically noting down our emissions, we can directly address the areas which have the highest emissions and offset those which we cannot reduce."

**Q: What was your biggest challenge in working through more sustainable ways of operating?**

A: The biggest challenge was getting the time and enthusiasm to work through the possibilities. A lot of the options out there are covered with red tape, or are just greenwashing, so finding options that are going to make a difference can be challenging. As an example, we investigated providing solar panels on our office roof, however due to the additional weight on the building, it was deemed that structural strengthening would be required. This meant that the solar panel project was not feasible, even with light-weight solar panels.

**Q: What is your key area of focus for improving your environmental sustainability?**

A: Our key areas of focus are to reduce our emissions due to transport. As we are a consultancy business, we do not directly emit a large amount of emissions, and our biggest factor by far is our transport, namely commuting and site visits. We have therefore been actively purchasing electric vehicles to reduce our emissions.

**Q: Which sustainability initiatives are you most proud of as a business and why?**

A: We are most proud of the leadership shown from our team on our sustainability journey so far. This ranges from our admin team who work hard to ensure we know which bin to use, our dedicated composting team, through to our Environment and Innovation Lead who has worked tirelessly on our Toitū certification and other sustainability measures.

The initiatives we are proud of includes our move to electric or hybrid vehicles. We have already replaced four cars in our fleet with electric vehicles and four with hybrids. We are also proud that we offer an incentive to those employees who take alternative transport to work, whether that be public transport, walking, or biking.

**Q: What are the benefits to your business of pursuing more sustainable operations? Tell us about some of the advantages for Cuttriss?**

A: Apart from the obvious benefits that we believe we are contributing to a better tomorrow, engagement with our team has been hugely rewarding. Our team have mentioned that they value working for a company that is actively pursuing sustainable operations, some even saying it was one of the main reasons for joining the company.

We have also been able to showcase our sustainability measures when applying for tenders, ultimately leading to successful engagements with new clients.

One other advantage is that the cost of running our cars is less as the fuel prices are rising. Now that our electric fleet is growing, we are not as impacted by these increases.

We also believe we are well positioned to help our communities adapt to a more sustainable way of living, by providing climate resilient homes. There are potential business opportunities in this space, and to know we are already committed to a more sustainable future aligns us well with those who need our services and are looking to adapt.

**Q: What are the biggest costs to your business of doing sustainability work? What are the opportunity costs?**

A: As we are a consultancy business the costs are mostly to do with lost chargeable time by our team working on sustainability initiatives. There is a cost in meeting the Toitū standards, and the other is the immediate cost of replacing the vehicles in our fleet, noting this is offset by a reduction in fuel and vehicle servicing costs. We also offer an Environmental Transport Incentive to our staff which is paid monthly.

In our view, the above costs are far outweighed by the opportunities our sustainability measures provide.

**Q: Share some of the best business sustainability resources that you have come across?**

A: Toitū is a really good resource as they not only help with becoming carbon zero, but they also have a lot of other resources to show you what projects you are helping and any legislation changes that may affect businesses coming up in the future.

**Q: If you had one piece of advice for another Kāpiti business about sustainability what would it be?**

The sustainability journey can be overwhelming, however through small incremental actions we can make a huge collective difference. So, advice would be to start small and tick off some easy wins, such as providing bins for recycling and composting, or getting in touch with industry experts such as Toitū to help you to get started, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

We want to ensure that the Kāpiti Coast remains a great place to call home and has a thriving natural environment for generations to come. Having this in mind when making sustainability decisions helps us with the motivation to carry on with our sustainability journey.

To find out more about Cuttriss and their sustainability initiatives visit <https://cuttriss.co.nz/>