
Introduction to RIMU's second biennial symposium, Data Matters:
The role of research and evaluation in shaping the future of Tāmaki Makaurau

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Ngā mihi ki a koutou and welcome!

Ko Eva McLaren taku ingoa

He kaiwhakahaere kairangahau ahau and on behalf of Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau and RIMU, I'd like to warmly welcome council, CCO and IMSB staff, academic and CRI colleagues, our central government partners and members of Auckland's communities and particularly Councillor Penny Hulse and Professor Juliet Gerrard to RIMU's biennial Symposium –
Data matters: The role of research and evaluation in shaping the future of Tāmaki Makaurau.

We're here today to do two things: firstly, to hear from Councillor Penny Hulse about the value of evidence to inform decision-making and Professor Juliet Gerrard, the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, on science advice in Aotearoa.

And secondly, RIMU scientists and researchers will showcase eight projects followed by responses from colleagues demonstrating how evidence has informed policy and the value the research has added to their work.

In addition, I encourage you all to have a look at the posters in the foyer and our displays and monitoring equipment past and present.

First, a little bit about RIMU and the context.

Auckland Council represents nearly 1.7 million people from an area stretching from Wellsford in the north to Franklin in the south. As a unitary authority, representing a fast growing, dynamic and diverse region, we need to ensure environmental sustainability as well as social inclusivity and economic prosperity. So, with the pressures of growth, Auckland's decision-makers rely on quality evidence like data, analysis and reflective evaluation which is essential for setting clear strategic objectives and to underpin decisions when potential trade-offs and options are evaluated.

RIMU, council's multi-disciplinary research and evaluation unit, was established on 1st November 2010 with the formation of the Auckland Council. Our brief was then, and remains, the provision of a robust evidence-base to underpin Council's activities.

A multi-disciplinary research centre is unique in both local and central government in New Zealand with very few, if any, comparable examples worldwide. It is a privilege to be part of this unit.

RIMU undertakes monitoring, research and evaluation demonstrating Auckland Council's strong recognition that policy development and implementation requires a long-term, sustained and integrated investment in science. For example, the foundation of our monitoring network today started in the early 1970s so we're in a good position to report on the effects of growth and change.

We have 5 teams:

- Social and economic;
- Land use and built environment;
- Water quality;
- Hydrology and data management; and
- Air, land and biodiversity.

Where once research was a side line, an addition to a busy work programme, it is now a core focus which means there is one place for applied research. Making it so much easier for our external and internal partners to engage with us. This is demonstrated in the success of working with the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) on the National Policy Statement Urban Development or on the data reporting which

fed into Environment Aotearoa 2019 or the multiple ways in which we engage with Statistics NZ.

This includes advising on sub-urbanised geographies used in the upcoming data outputs like the Census or Alison Reid, a Manager in RIMU co-chairing the Census Expert Data Panel.

We manage over 1,000 monitoring sites, annually publish over 30 technical peer reviewed reports; have widely read monthly publications like the Housing Monitor and also undertake extensive capacity building.

This centralised model is so successful because RIMU:

- has multiple disciplines working together;
- has research practitioners at its core;
- has a high degree of quality management processes and protocols which include a peer review panel and a human participant ethics committee – again unique in local government;
- acts as a repository and/or single source of key statistics; and
- ensures access to, and transparency of, policy relevant data and evidence. All RIMU Auckland-related publications are available on the Knowledge Auckland and environmental data on Environment Auckland.

But, how do we deliver relevant evidence within the constraints of capacity, budget and time?

- We undertake **inhouse primary** research or monitoring where we are best equipped to do so- either when requested or in anticipation of upcoming requirements. An example of this is outlined in Dr Allpress' upcoming presentation on *Using behavioural insights to improve council services*;
- We **lead** where we're able to gather the best teams. For example, the research on the mana whenua cultural values and Auckland Council's resource consent process which exemplifies a collaborative working relationship and will be outlined by Dr Jacob Otter and Ian Smallburn shortly; or
- We **partner** with others where this is most effective. You'll see several examples in the presentations that follow such as seabird monitoring and research undertaken in partnership with the University of Auckland and Auckland Museum or Pest Free Kaipatiki where RIMU is partnering with the community.

These alliances and relationships are critical because the interface between science and policy demands as much capability from knowledge providers as knowledge users and working closely to determine priorities, gaps and appropriate research questions is critical. There is no doubt that that the relationship between policy formation and evidence must be interactive.

So, this symposium is as much about highlighting the generation of evidence as it is a reminder or call to action around alliances and we encourage you to talk to us, identify opportunities to work with us and to share with us any gaps or critical research questions that need to be explored.

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