

Downer: Social Purpose and a Just Transition



Social Purpose in business

Sustainability, decarbonisation, and climate change – these are all terms the majority of Aotearoa is becoming familiar with. But fewer people will be familiar with Social Purpose and a Just Transition.

If you ask what the purpose of that business is, you might get an answer along the lines of 'providing services or goods to people'. A business's 'social purpose', however, has to recognise how it profits from using people's knowledge, time and skills, and the wider societal infrastructure (education and healthcare systems for example); and that this creates an obligation to give back to the communities in which our business operate.

So, as our economy shifts to sustainable production, we must consider what happens to the community during that transition. For example, what will happen to the livelihood of workers and communities of businesses depending on carbon intensive activities?

How can we as a nation support all the associated business who would lose their revenue and livelihoods, and how do we support the community to survive and thrive in the future?

Downer New Zealand's National Sustainability Manager Suzanne Watt says,

"The addition of the Just Transition concept to our social purpose makes explicit this obligation to society as a whole. In the words of the Honourable James Shaw, a just transition means 'transitioning in a way that is fair and equitable that leaves no community, no family, and no person behind'."

Businesses recognising and fulfilling their social purpose through this just transition must become the norm for the business sector as we move towards becoming a sustainable nation with Net Zero Carbon.

Downer's Purpose

Downer is revamping its Sustainability Strategy to transform its business, and better embrace and act on our social purpose. Our decarbonisation pathway needs to encompass social interventions to secure employees' rights and livelihoods.

Downer has designed, built, maintained, and operated vital important infrastructure in Aotearoa for 150 years. As a business, we have a role to play in contributing to outcomes that endow future generation with the resources they need to thrive.



With the size and spread of our business across the motu, our activities touch the lives of many communities, both rural and urban. Beyond the work we do delivering infrastructure services, our biggest social impact is through the income and skills enhancement we provide to our people, our supply chain, and directly with our community and philanthropic initiatives.

These social impacts support individuals to grow and develop, providing income for their whānau, and enable community groups to achieve their goals – whether environmental or social.



Empowering our people

At Downer, people come first. We offer a wide range of opportunities for development, training and growth, and a multitude of support systems (from career pathways to mental health and wellbeing support) to ensure all our people thrive.

For instance, working alongside Te Puni Kōkiri, our [Te Ara Whanake leadership programme](#) is designed to enhance Māori representation at all levels of the business. By encouraging the career progression of our Māori employees, we provide the tools and techniques to help shape influential leaders that will be drivers of change in their local communities.

We run initiatives to encourage as many people as possible to volunteer time, skills and knowledge in their local communities and environment.



Community focus

We have 10,000 people working for Downer across Aotearoa – living, earning and spending in communities both big and small. We're proud to be employing and helping secure livelihoods and believe it is critical to the survival of our regional communities through the transition to Net Zero.

In 2021 our Downer Delights pilot programme supported 29 small community charities and fundraising projects important to our staff and their local communities. In 2022/23 we plan to transform this pilot into an annual programme.

In addition to this support and volunteering, our people work hard to support communities in times of emergency, whether restoring power and communications, or re-building and clearing roads, helping communities regroup and recover from emergency events.

Decarbonisation and Environmental stewardship

Downer is committed to reducing our contribution of greenhouse gases (GHG) to net zero by 2050. To fulfil this climate change commitment, we're actively decarbonising our business through transitioning our fleet to low - or zero-emission, switching our manufacturing heat process furnaces to electricity, and improving the efficiency of our activities. Beyond this, we are actively exploring how we use our decarbonisation actions and transition experience and knowledge to support our subcontractors and local communities to do the same.

Most of our bitumen tanks are currently heated using either diesel or natural gas. But we have now transitioned one to fully electric heating which will save 290 tonnes of carbon emissions per year. We have five more tanks to electrify in the coming years.

Supplier diversity

Our new strategic plan sees us looking to partner with similarly-aligned organisations to identify and reduce poverty and inequity issues in our communities. We rely on our supply chain relationships to deliver successfully for our customers. As an Aukōkiri member of Amotai, we hope to demonstrate our commitment to supporting the diversification of our supply chain. Through Amotai, our people can now access a register of businesses nationwide that are Māori or Pasifika-owned, which will help us to provide more opportunities to grow Māori and Pasifika businesses.

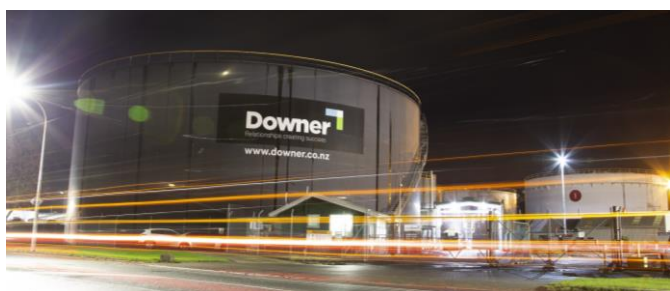
Part of Downer's culture involves ensuring that when we complete projects in a community, we leave knowing that the environment is in a better state than when we arrived. We have strong and effective measures to drive our environmental commitment, and we work with our partners to mitigate potential negative impacts.

The protection of the ecosystems and the unique biodiversity of the sites we work on is essential. For example, our bridge-widening project over the Pūharakekenui/Styx River in Christchurch required a temporary re-homing of rare New Zealand native Lamprey fish. Our approach resulted in a world-first for the relocation and salvage of around 1000 Lamprey, and they have settled well after being returned to their revitalised home.

Where to from here?

With our sustainability plan in place, our next steps are to shape and refine our strategic programmes, embed them across our business, and continue to build partnerships so that acting on our social purpose becomes part of our DNA.

“We want our people and communities to benefit from our business operating in their community, and to identify and support communities through the decarbonisation transition, so that they can survive and thrive in the transition to Net Zero.”



About Downer

Downer is the largest provider of integrated services in New Zealand and employs 10,000 people from Kaitaia to Invercargill. At Downer, sustainability means sustainable and profitable growth, providing value to our customers, delivering our services in a safe and environmentally responsible manner, helping our people to be better and advancing the communities in which we operate. With our services impacting millions of lives every day, the sustainability of our operations is paramount – for our people, partners, shareholders, customers and their customers.

About SBC

SBC is a member organisation that connects businesses, partners, and sectors to create impact that no single business could achieve alone. We work with executives and sustainability professionals to maximise their positive impact for shareholders, communities and the environment. We hold our members to account by asking them to fulfil member commitments. We deliver impact by championing our members to be at the leading-edge of sustainability and inspire other businesses to take action.