



# NIWA's 10 years of procurement success with Unimarket.

## An eProcurement success story

NIWA chose Unimarket when it needed a procurement solution that was easy to use and had the flexibility to manage its complex approvals process.

The company provides New Zealand's decision-makers with expert analysis and insight into the natural environment. With approximately 730 people working across 14 sites, NIWA's staff conduct leading environmental science on research platforms around New Zealand and the wider Pacific region.

Janine Alliston is NIWA's Senior Finance Manager, Financial Systems. She says procurement "was quite a different environment" before the company implemented the Unimarket solution in 2012.

### Specialized procurement needs

NIWA works at the cutting edge of research and applied science services and has precise purchasing requirements. Most of its spend is off-catalog and with niche suppliers delivering specialized equipment. NIWA's researchers and operational staff need the flexibility to determine their own purchase requirements and be confident products and services are exactly right for their needs.

So how did NIWA manage these precise procurement needs before the introduction of Unimarket? "Not as well as we would have liked," laughs Janine. "Purchases used to be made through our finance system. It was clunky and horrible, so most people didn't like using it. We didn't have full visibility of many of our orders until the invoices showed up."

NIWA knew it needed to improve its procurement process, but finding a solution to meet its decentralized and unique procurement needs wasn't simple.

"We needed something that was nice and easy and didn't require a lot of training to use," says Janine. "A lot of our spend is on a project basis as well, so we needed a system that could manage that and the different approval mechanisms involved."



The National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) conducts leading environmental science that supports the sustainable management of New Zealand's natural resources.

Staff count: 730

Number of sites: 14

ERP: Oracle Cloud

### Simple buying and total transparency

Unimarket's eProcurement solution seemed to tick all the boxes for NIWA. It was much easier to purchase through, it could support its project-centric approval workflows, and it provided much greater visibility and accountability.

NIWA was also impressed with Unimarket's commitment to improve and expand on the functionality of its eProcurement solution in ways that best suit its clients. "We liked Unimarket because they had a really good roadmap and they listened to our ideas," says Janine.

The company went ahead with a Unimarket implementation and hasn't looked back.

Aside from rare exceptions, all invoices now have a pre-assigned purchase order, and there's a digital record of all transactions. This is "a really big win" in delivering much-needed transparency and tracking. "We've certainly gained from that visibility. We can now see what spend is coming up and what's actually committed, rather than it being an estimate," says Janine.

"Being able to review our entire purchase history through the system is also one of the big benefits for users. We used to have to go through folders and folders of paper requisitions and invoices to find details of the purchase if we had a problem with a piece of equipment," recalls Janine.

## Choosing Unimarket again

NIWA recently reassessed its finance system needs and started the search for a replacement for its on-premise Oracle system. The company thought a more modern system could offer the kind of simple purchasing and procurement capability it was now used to with Unimarket. If so, it could potentially manage everything through a single system.

"We looked at seven finance systems of different kinds," says Janine. "But what was really interesting was that although these systems had progressed a lot, none of them were as good as Unimarket for procurement."

Janine says the "very manual and clunky" alternative systems made the decision to stick with the Unimarket eProcurement solution easy: "It was a hands-down 'no' to changing procurement solutions. The value just wasn't there."

NIWA decided to upgrade to the cloud Oracle finance system and started work on the imposing project to transition between the two and reintegrate the Unimarket solution. NIWA, a third-party consultancy, and Unimarket all worked side-by-side throughout.

"The Unimarket team was fantastic by getting in and working with our consultants, putting in our finance system, coming up with solutions, and troubleshooting in a number of areas as well," says Janine.

## A collaborative partnership

After 10 years of working with Unimarket, it's clear that this is more of a partnership than a typical vendor-client relationship. Janine says the two teams have worked closely together to improve processes and create better procurement outcomes right from the start: "Unimarket hasn't just implemented the solution and walked away. They've worked with us to continuously improve."

Even during crunch times when the pressure has been on, such as during the transition between finance systems, the NIWA team has felt supported.

"It's an excellent working relationship. I certainly feel like I can just flick the Unimarket team a message if I've got a fundamental issue and it will get resolved," says Janine.

"It's really important to have a solution provider that's invested in what you're doing and what you're trying to achieve."

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**Janine Alliston**, Senior Finance Manager,  
Financial Systems at NIWA.

## Results



Easy purchasing for decentralized users



99% of all invoices now have a corresponding purchase order



A flexible approvals process that supports project spend



Visibility into committed spend



Speedy invoice processing

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