

BIODIVERSITY OUTSIDE PUBLIC CONSERVATION LANDS: THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

Background

New Zealand has unique biodiversity. We have an extensive network of public conservation lands that are critical to protecting indigenous biodiversity. Other land, including much private land, retains natural areas and habitats, many of which are not well represented on public conservation lands. Some of these are formally protected, while many others are maintained by the day-to-day management decisions of landowners. Notwithstanding a high level of formal and informal protection, indigenous biodiversity is in decline. To address that decline we need to better manage our public conservation lands and we need to encourage more private landowners to be more biodiversity-aware in the way they manage land.

The Government's response to the decline in biodiversity is set out, in broad terms, in the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, released in March 2000. At the same time, a separate ministerial advisory committee was established to investigate and advise on how we can best achieve effective and sustainable management of biodiversity outside public conservation lands, such as farms, suburban backyards, and council reserves.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee carried out extensive consultation and invited public submissions. It completed its final report, including recommendations for action, in September 2000.

The initiatives set out below are the Government's response to that report.

The package

Both the Ministry for the Environment and the Department of Conservation will be involved in implementing the initiatives in this package. The success of the package relies on a partnership with local government to support and encourage landholders to continue the transition to biodiversity-aware land management.

The package is made up of seven key initiatives:

1. Enhancing capacity in local government by supporting pilot projects

The Government sees local government as a key player in addressing biodiversity issues outside public conservation lands. Local government already has core legislative functions under Resource Management Act, the Biosecurity Act and the Reserves Act.

To assist local government with these functions and to build an effective partnership, the Government is committed to enhancing the capacity of local government to address biodiversity issues. It will do so by contributing to local government pilot projects aimed

at establishing effective regional governance arrangements and enhancing community participation. (Other elements in the package may also contribute to building capacity in local government).

Local Government New Zealand has been invited to submit a proposal for a three-year funding programme beginning in 2000/2001.

2. A national policy statement under the Resource Management Act

The Resource Management Act provides for the development of a national policy statement (NPS) that regional and district council policies must “not be inconsistent with”. Also, when councils consider applications for resource consent they must “have regard” to any NPS.

The Government will develop an NPS on biodiversity in partnership with local government, by way of a joint central/local government working group. This will be the first NPS of its kind. The New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement is also an NPS, but is mandatory under the Act and has been in place since 1994.

The NPS will provide guidance on how councils should take account of biodiversity in the exercise of their Resource Management Act functions. It will provide a national policy **framework** that emphasises the importance of biodiversity but will be sufficiently broad to allow the exercise of discretion in determining the most appropriate and effective means to achieve the outcomes.

Funding for an NPS and associated guidance was provided in the 2000/2001 budget. Work will begin, with local government, in the first half of 2001. Stakeholders will be kept informed of progress.

3. A biodiversity advisory service

One of the critical gaps in our present response to biodiversity issues is the lack of a service offering reliable, respected advice for landowners wanting to adapt land management practices to achieve better biodiversity outcomes.

The Government is committed to the provision of such a service. It may take different forms, and be delivered by different agencies in different regions as the strength and nature of potential providers varies. This approach relies on establishing partnerships with local government and other potential providers.

A fund allocation committee will be established comprising representatives from the existing funding bodies (Nature Heritage Fund, Nga Whenua Rahui, Queen Elizabeth II National Trust), local government, the Ministry for the Environment and the Department of Conservation.

\$3.6 million (over four years) was allocated for an advisory service in the 2000/2001 budget as part of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy funding package.

4. Increased funding for existing protection mechanisms

The existing programmes to assist landowners and increase the extent of formally protected areas are the Nature Heritage Fund, Nga Whenua Rahui, and the QEII National Trust covenanting programme. These three programmes are complementary and have all proven to be successful means of protecting biodiversity. However, their effectiveness has been restricted by a funding shortage.

The 2000/2001 budget included an extra \$30.5 million over the five years to 2004/2005 to be shared amongst these programmes.

5. Fund aimed at improving the condition of biodiversity

For over two decades central government has been providing funding to increase the extent of areas in formal protection. However, very little central government funding has been available for ongoing management such as pest and weed control, fencing and restoration projects on privately owned land. Very often the biggest threat to biodiversity comes from management challenges and not from the threat of deliberate destruction.

The provision of a new “condition fund” recognises this risk. It will make funding available directly to individuals and community groups and will make specific provision for local government proposals that seek to assist landowners and communities. The same committee that allocates the advisory service funding will make allocation of the biodiversity improvement fund.

\$6.5 million (over four years) was allocated for a biodiversity improvement fund in the 2000/2001 budget as part of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy funding package.

6. Clarify role of local government in legislation

While local government has functions directly relevant to biodiversity conservation, there are some matters of detail where the extent of responsibility is not clear. The Government will clarify the lead role of regional councils and the important role of territorial authorities in biodiversity conservation by amending the Resource Management Act.

The Government is also committed to further investigating biodiversity matters and the role of local government in the context of other policy processes already underway. This includes the Local Government Act review and the development of a biosecurity strategy.

7. A commitment to further work on a national governance structure

A wide range of public and private organisations are currently involved in biodiversity and private land issues, projects, and programmes. There is currently no specific coordination mechanism by which these parties can share information, set priorities and coordinate actions.

The Government is committed to investigate how to better coordinate action at the national level.

Further information

Copies of the Ministerial Advisory Committee's preliminary report '*Bio-what?*', the summary of submissions received on *Bio-what?*, and the Committee's final report are available from the Ministry for the Environment, contact publications (04) 917 7493, or email publications@mfe.govt.nz

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