



NEW ZEALAND ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Submission on the Department of Conservation Biodiversity Strategy

Given the current status of the biodiversity of Aotearoa New Zealand, the New Zealand Ecological Society supports all efforts to conserve our biodiversity. The new Biodiversity Strategy is essential for addressing the decline in biodiversity for the well-being of all New Zealanders but it is particularly important for Māori. We encourage DOC to continue to develop partnerships with tangata whenua at a range of scales across the country in addressing biodiversity decline. We support the underpinning framework drawing on Te Ao Māori values and processes and using a combination of Mātauranga Māori and science. To achieve this goal of integration of approaches and empowerment of tangata whenua, we would like to see an increase in the number of Māori staff within DOC. The department has better community integration in some parts of the country than others. Specific funding for building these partnerships would be a valuable investment where tangata whenua feel disenfranchised.

Biodiversity is strongly linked to health of ecosystems, people and the economy of New Zealand. Not properly addressing the biodiversity crisis has many potential risks including extinction of threatened species, declines in ecosystem services, cultural disconnection from the natural environment and loss of income. We believe the current freshwater crisis and climate change are intertwined with loss of biodiversity so the strategy is addressing the challenge of declining biodiversity but it also represents an opportunity to address broader environmental issues including water quality and climate change mitigation. We encourage DOC to work with other government agencies, regional councils, research organisations, NGOs and other interested parties in addressing these issues.

We support the vision that by 2070, 'Nature in Aotearoa is healthy, abundant, and thriving. Current and future generations connect with nature, restore it, and are restored by it.' However, given the large size of the conservation estate and the numbers of endangered species, achieving this goal is going to be hugely challenging with the limited amount of funding available for conservation. Therefore, working with partners and having clear and effective prioritisation processes for best value for money investment are going to be essential. However, we caution against relying on voluntary organisations and community groups to meet conservation responsibilities.

Funding for conservation is tightly tied to the political landscape. While DOC has little control over the political cycle, there may be actions they can take to buffer against unfavourable political situations. A long-term document like the Biodiversity Strategy seems like a good opportunity to be considering potential guidelines or processes that might help deliver good environmental outcomes regardless of the political situation.

Other specific recommendations -

- 1) Better protection for all native species. For instance, kauri is the fourth most endangered conifer species on the planet but trees on private land are not protected. All plants outside the conservation estate are currently unprotected by law. Weta punga are also unprotected. These are just two examples of iconic species that are not protected in the current legal situation.
- 2) Specific reference to climate change impacts on all biodiversity of New Zealand. Some ecosystems will be more vulnerable to the threats of climate change than others (for instance, the alpine zone and coastal fringes) but climate change will continue to act as an overarching threat. We must prepare for extreme events such as drought and fire which can be particularly damaging. However, climate change is likely to exacerbate existing threats through interactive impacts. For instance, fragmented populations of skinks are likely to be more vulnerable to local extinction when extreme events occur.
- 3) Invasive species impacts remain the biggest threat to most species. Climate change is likely to create more favourable conditions for some invasive species (including invasive weeds and insects that can survive warmer winters) so continuing to control current pests and controlling new invasives will need to be a top priority. This requires progress in use of new techniques and technologies with significant investment in research and development. We encourage DOC to establish an independent advisory board to ensure wise investment in this space. We support ongoing use of existing tools, including 1080.
- 4) Ongoing research and dissemination of results is important to assess progress and achieve conservation goals. This should occur in parallel with ongoing monitoring.

Our responses to specific questions in the discussion document –

Q1) Part 1 provides a solid overview of the issues but we would like to see further details on points 1-4 above.

Q2) The proposed strategy framework is an effective way of capturing the range of considerations but the implementation pathways are not well-articulated in this schematic.

Q3) The vision is ambitious. We support ambitious goals but with a fifty year timeframe, there may be a tendency to put off necessary actions until later. We would therefore like to see specific goals based on shorter, more immediate timeframes to keep the strategy on track.

Q4) The underpinning values and principles seem appropriate and suitably aspirational.

Q5) While global change is an important target for effective conservation, excluding the threat of invasive species from this table seems like an oversight given the established impacts.

Q6) How will the ten key freshwater and land-based pests and weeds be identified? Will they be low-hanging fruit or the most damaging species or a mixture of both? This seems a bit vague at present. Otherwise the goals seem worthwhile. Adding more positive goals like maintenance of ecosystem functions like carbon uptake and storage (rather than preventing degradation and killing pests) may add to the suite of goals.

Q7) Independent advice is likely to help ensure delivery on implementation. Regional representation from iwi should be a central part of any advisory board or panel.

Q8) Publicly available reports should be produced as part of the review strategy.

Q9) Reporting and transparency are essential if DOC truly want to partner with iwi, community groups and the general public. Whether this should be included as a 'system shift' is unclear but it certainly needs to be a central part of enacting the biodiversity strategy.

Q10) Defining roles and responsibilities is important but we encourage DOC to show leadership in implementing the biodiversity strategy and resist dispersing responsibility to other organisations. We agree that the strategy needs to be connected to relevant local iwi, organisations and communities throughout the country with some scope to be regionally customised.

Q11) This system shift should be a very high priority. We support all efforts to empower kaitiakitanga.

Q12) If communities are going to be a central part of the conservation strategy, they need to be fully informed about latest techniques and technologies for pest control, restoration and other community activities. DOC should develop better communication tools (for instance an online community hub or community app) and report progress and updates in a timely fashion. Social media and the threatened species ambassador are existing tools for communication and outreach but there is scope for development of more agile and responsive tools for two-way communications.

Q13) Addressing ecosystem decline in a connected way is a worthwhile goal because ecosystems are interconnected. The priority actions for this system shift are good. We support the inclusion of farm systems in this goal since conservation can happen outside the conservation estate. However, does DOC have a clear idea of who they will be working with for each of these goals? The timing of the one billion trees goal may need to be brought forward if it is going to be effective as the ten year project will be more than halfway to completion by the time three to four years have passed.

Q14) Investment in development of new technologies is essential to meet predator free 2050 goals as existing methods are not effective over large areas. Seeking ongoing advice from experts in Mātauranga and science will be essential for the success of this system shift. Staying ahead of community attitudes to developing technologies will also be essential.

Q15) See our introductory notes for our overview of our feedback on the effectiveness of the strategy. Clear processes for implementation and strong leadership are critical for the effectiveness of the strategy.

Q16) As Aotearoa New Zealand is an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot, DOC has a special responsibility for conservation of our indigenous species in the global context in addition to the special responsibility DOC has as treaty partners. The overall outcome should be the same – protection and enhancement of resilient ecosystems.

In conclusion, our members are strongly committed to biodiversity conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand. We conclude by reiterating our support for the strongest possible protection of our biological heritage for the well-being and enjoyment of all.

Prepared by – Cate Macinnis-Ng, NZES President

September 2019.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cate Macinnis-Ng', with a large, sweeping flourish underneath.