



## Protecting our Places

INTRODUCING THE NATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR PROTECTING RARE AND THREATENED NATIVE BIODIVERSITY ON PRIVATE LAND



## Message from Ministers

Private landowners have a crucial role to play in saving New Zealand's at-risk native plants and animals. Some of our most rare and threatened ecosystems and species are now found only on private land; their long term survival will depend largely on the stewardship (kaitiakitanga) of landowners.

We are fortunate in New Zealand because many of our landowners are already showing a growing interest in and commitment to conservation. To build on this, and stimulate new thinking, the government has been exploring ways of supporting and encouraging private landowners in their endeavours.

We have already established a fund to provide financial assistance for conservation work on private land, and over \$10 million has been given in grants. Another \$40.6 million has also been provided through agencies like the QE II Trust and Ngā Whenua Rahui to help people covenant private land.

Nevertheless, there remains a need to provide a better framework for decision-making about biodiversity on private land, particularly for regional and district councils who work directly with landowners in local areas.

To this end, we have developed a statement of national priorities to focus conservation efforts on private land where the need is greatest. We have sought to do so while providing the flexibility for local decision-making.

Our expectation is that the priorities in this statement will be used to support and inform councils' biodiversity responsibilities under the Resource Management Act. We believe this can be best achieved within a cooperative rather than a legislative framework.

It is important to remember that many of the species and environments encompassed in this statement are crucial to our national identity. They are part of what makes our country such a spectacular place to live and they play a larger part than just scenery.

Our biodiversity provides important resources and services, such as clean air and water, fertile soils, pollution and flood control. As we adapt to the fluctuations and disturbances of climate change, we must remember that biodiversity helps provide stability and resilience, allowing ecosystems and species to cope with and adapt to change.

This statement of national priorities for protecting rare and threatened species on private land recognises these needs, and seeks to help landowners, councils, central government, the public and others play their part in preserving our heritage for all of us.



Chris Carter



David Benson-Pope

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Chris Carter".

Chris Carter  
MINISTER OF CONSERVATION

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "David Benson-Pope".

David Benson-Pope  
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Photos front cover:  
Waikanae planting. *Photo: Dave Hansford*  
Sand dunes at Oputere Beach, Coromandel. *Photo: Herb Christophers*  
Kereru feeding on *Coprosma propinqua* berries, Kapiti Island. *Photo: JL Kendrick*  
Kawaka-kauri forest remnant, Whakairiora, Northland. *Photo: Jan Doak*

## Why the Statement of National Priorities has been developed

Much of our rare and threatened native biodiversity is found on private land – in fact, some species are now only found on private land. The national priorities in the statement identify the types of ecosystems and habitats most in need of protection.

The statement supports the government's pledge to maintain and preserve New Zealand's natural heritage. This began in 1992 when we signed the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity; followed in 2000 with the release of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

The statement will be of particular use to local government, which has the primary responsibility for protecting native biodiversity on private land – a role assigned to them under the Resource Management Act (RMA) 1991. Along with clear priorities, the statement provides a national perspective which councils can use in planning and decision-making.

Central government will work with local government and landowners to develop a broad programme of guidance about biodiversity protection, including the mechanisms available to achieve it and increasing knowledge about the national priorities at a regional and local level. Progress on biodiversity protection achieved through this work programme, including this statement, will be monitored over the next five years.

New Zealand has about 14 million hectares or around half of its original native vegetation left, of which about 8.2 million hectares are legally protected. Scattered across the country are 5.8 million hectares with no formal protection.

## What's currently happening

### Efforts by private landowners

Landowners' commitment to protecting indigenous biodiversity is reflected in the growing popularity of Queen Elizabeth II National Trust (QEII) covenants. It took about 20 years to register the 1000th covenant, but the next 1000 took half that time. By January 2005, more than 70,000 hectares had been covenanted.

### Local government initiatives

Councils use a range of policy tools and other mechanisms to support biodiversity. There is an investment of \$4.26 million per year by regional councils in contestable biodiversity funds. Most councils support on-the-ground activities such as covenants, landcare groups, education and landowner advice.

### Central government initiatives

The efforts of councils, communities, landowners and iwi have been backed up by funding of \$40.6 million for the QEII Trust, Ngā Whenua Rahui and the Nature Heritage Fund over the first five years of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

A further \$6.5 million has been allocated to community initiatives through the Biodiversity Condition Fund, with another \$3.6 million through the Biodiversity Advice Fund.

Whenuakite Kiwi Care  
Group chairman Arthur  
Hinds setting a trap for  
stoats.  
*Photo: Dave Hansford*



## The National Priorities

Four national priorities for biodiversity protection have been set, and are described here. They are based on the latest and best scientific research available.

**National Priority 1: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with land environments, (defined by Land Environments of New Zealand at Level IV), that have 20 percent or less remaining in indigenous cover.**

Land Environments of New Zealand (LENZ) is a national classification system used to map areas that are similar to each other, regardless of where they occur. LENZ uses 15 climate, landform and soil variables that can influence the distribution of species to identify areas with similar environment or ecosystem character. These are known as 'land environments'.

By combining LENZ maps with satellite images from the Land Cover Database, as well as databases showing land tenure, we can identify changes in vegetation cover over time and see what vegetation is formally protected.

We now know that close to 468,000 hectares of unprotected native vegetation is in land environments reduced to less than 20 percent of their original extent. This is a concern, because scientific research has shown that the rate of biodiversity loss increases dramatically when native vegetation cover drops below 20 percent of what it was before humans arrived.



From left: Kahikatea forest remnant, Waikato.

*Photo: Mark Smale*

Relict short tussock and saline vegetation, Central Otago.

*Photo: Bill Lee*

**National Priority 2: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with sand dunes and wetlands; ecosystem types that have become uncommon due to human activity.**

Only 45,600 hectares of wetlands remain in New Zealand – just 9.4 percent of the original extent. It is probable that most wetlands in lowland areas are in private hands.

At least 20 percent of our vascular (sappy) plant species depend on short-lived (ephemeral) wetlands that occupy less than one percent of the country's land area.

Only 21,300 hectares of dunelands are left in New Zealand – 11.6 percent of their original extent. Coastal dunelands are identified as a national priority ecosystem under the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement.

From left: DOC staff helping students plant pingao, Otago. *Photo: Nicola Vallance*

Toreparu wetland, Waikato. This 220 hectare wetland is mainly in private ownership, with a portion managed by the Department of Conservation as a wildlife reserve.

*Photo: Karen Denyer*



**National Priority 3: To protect indigenous vegetation associated with ‘originally rare’ terrestrial ecosystem types not already covered by priorities 1 and 2.**



Steam rising from Craters of the Moon, Wairakei. Foreground: prostrate kanuka occurs only in geothermal areas, here, colonising heated ground. Photo: Susan Wiser

This priority includes native vegetation associated with:

- 12 types of coastal systems, such as coastal turf and coastal rock stacks
- 25 inland and alpine systems, ranging from recent lava flows to braided riverbeds
- four types of other inland systems, such as salt pans and geothermal systems
- two types of semi-subterranean systems – sinkholes and cave entrances.

The full list of originally rare terrestrial ecosystem types is on the [www.biodiversity.govt.nz](http://www.biodiversity.govt.nz) website. The list was compiled by Landcare Research, and our knowledge will be updated as new research results come to hand. The ecosystem types are not necessarily found in all regions or districts, and some of them will be protected on public conservation land.

*Originally* means the ecosystem type was present when Māori arrived, and still exists today. *Rare* means the total extent of each originally rare ecosystem type is less than 0.5 percent of New Zealand’s total area – that is, less than 134,000 hectares.

Originally rare ecosystem types encompass those that are small in area but geographically widespread, as well as those that are larger, but are geographically restricted.

In New Zealand, much indigenous biodiversity is concentrated in rare ecosystems (such as bluffs, karst, and geothermal vents and coastal turfs).

Originally rare plant community types make up about half of all nationally threatened plant species, but are present in only a small area. This makes them prime candidates for attention in biodiversity conservation initiatives.

Limestone cliffs at Sawcut Gorge, Marlborough. Photo: Supplied by Susan Wiser





## National Priority 4: To protect habitats of acutely and chronically threatened indigenous species.

The Department of Conservation has direct responsibility for the protection of threatened species and carries out habitat protection work on public conservation lands. But many threatened species exist on private land as well as on public conservation lands, and some occur exclusively on private land. Protecting the habitats of species on private land will help towards protecting the species themselves.

*Acutely* and *chronically* threatened native species meet specific criteria in the *New Zealand Threat Classification System Lists* created by the Department of Conservation. Up-to-date lists are published on the department's website (see [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) and search under New Zealand Threat Classification System).

At December 2006, 668 species were considered to be *acutely* threatened and 257 were listed as *chronically* threatened.

From left: The chronically threatened sand daphne, *Pimelea arenaria*, at Whakataki Beach, near Castlepoint, Wairarapa. Photo: Colin Ogle

The wrybill is the only bird in the world with a sideways-bent beak, and is one of New Zealand's most endangered birds. Photo: MF Soper

Wellington green gecko on manuka. Photo: Rod Morris

## How the Statement of National Priorities can be used

It is expected that working to the same national priorities will help local and central government agencies coordinate their decisions and on-the-ground actions in relation to biodiversity.

### Local government

Because of their responsibilities for biodiversity on private land (under Sections 30 and 31 of the Resource Management Act), councils have the lead in putting the statement of national priorities into practice.

They can do this in a number of ways, such as, in communications about biodiversity, management of their own council land, by bringing these priorities into their statutory RMA policies and plans,<sup>1</sup> and using the priorities to decide where to allocate council-provided funding for community and landowner-based biodiversity programmes.

### Central government

The priorities in this statement will guide central government's grant decisions under the Biodiversity Condition and Advice Funds, jointly administered by the Department of Conservation and the Ministry for the Environment.

This statement will also be used to inform the government's own Crown land management programmes and government funding decisions that may affect biodiversity on private land; for example, funding decisions for the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, Ngā Whenua Rahui, and the Nature Heritage Fund.

<sup>1</sup> The national priorities in the statement complement section 6(c) of the RMA, but are only part of councils' responsibilities for biodiversity under the RMA.

## Stakeholders

The statement provides a focus for agencies that allocate science and research funding, as well as industry and private sector investors in biodiversity protection.

Other agencies and stakeholders (including industry groups, non-government organisations, environmental groups and landowners) can use the priorities to guide their decisions on where to focus their funds and efforts.

## What the National Priorities mean for your region

Regional information will become available over the next year from your council and at [www.biodiversity.govt.nz/](http://www.biodiversity.govt.nz/)

## Terms used in this brochure

**Biodiversity (biological diversity):** This describes the variety of all biological life – plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms – the genes they contain and the ecosystems on land or in water where they live. It is the diversity of life on Earth and includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems.

**Habitat:** The place or type of area in which a living thing naturally occurs.

**Ecosystem:** An interacting system of living and non-living parts, including sunlight, air, water, minerals and nutrients. Ecosystems can be small and short-lived, for example, water-filled tree holes or logs rotting on a forest floor; or they can be large and long-lived, such as forests and lakes.

**Indigenous (native) vegetation:** A plant community containing naturally occurring native species. It includes vegetation that has regenerated with human help following disturbance, but does not include plantations or vegetation established for commercial and/or aesthetic purposes.

**Land environment:** Describes an area whose boundaries encompass similar environmental characteristics caused by non-living variables, such as climate, landform and soil.

## Further information

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This brochure, and more information about the national priorities, is available on the biodiversity website, [www.biodiversity.govt.nz/](http://www.biodiversity.govt.nz/)



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