

Meeting with Minister Jones on Stewardship Land 28/7/25

Key information on the changes to the purposes of the Conservation Act

Cabinet has “directed the Minister of Conservation to amend the purpose statement for the Conservation Act 1987 (the Act) to ensure the NCPS and area plans referred to above can enable greater economic development on conservation land” [CAB-25-MIN-0213.01 refers].
(This is the exact wording of the minute, for your reference)

- Note that there isn’t a single specific *purpose clause* in the Act. While section 6 - in outlining functions - does act like a purpose statement, other sections spread throughout the Act also contribute to the understanding of its purpose.
- To give effect to Cabinet’s direction, DOC is preparing advice on options for relevant changes to the Act to ensure that the more enabling NCPS and Area Plans that the Government has in mind are consistent with the Act.
- This is about making sure the new planning instruments – the National Conservation Policy Statement and area plans – can appropriately set policies and rules which support more economic activities on conservation land.
- A more fundamental review of the purpose of the Conservation Act will jeopardise timeframes for this reform, and will not necessarily lead to greater certainty (e.g. the Fisheries Act purpose statement is broad, but the subject of extensive litigation).
- Changing the purposes in the Conservation Act provides the certainty needed to ensure the new rules are clear and effective. This will help deliver the intended benefits for businesses and local economies, while protecting the environment.
 - Current stewardship land processes will have to be completed based on the existing Act and notified options.
- The Crown Minerals Act and Fast-track Approvals Act already provide for greater focus on development when approving significant projects, not bound by the purposes set out in the Conservation Act.

MOC Deep Dive: CALM Bill

Bryan Dunne, Angela Bell, Gayathiri Ganeshan
23 March 2026



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government



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Objectives of the session

- Refresh you on progress to date
- Highlight key outstanding MOC decisions needed to meet timeframes
- Existing timeframes for reference:
 - 10 April: Ministerial consultation on draft Cabinet paper completed
 - 16 April: Lodging of final Cabinet paper and Bill
 - 20 April: Cabinet approval and Bill introduction
 - 23 April: First reading

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Objectives of your reforms

Outcomes sought

Supporting economic growth and businesses on conservation land

+

Regulatory efficiency and faster processes

+

Generating revenue to improve outcomes for conservation

+

Providing clarity about the Government's Treaty obligations

Bill components

NCPS and area plans will have same decision-maker and provide **clearer and simpler planning rules**

Purpose changes to make it clear the role of NCPS and area plans is to **enable economic development**

Bill will make it easier to **competitively allocate and transfer** concessions among businesses

NCPS will make **bulk decisions** for low risk activities

Bill will **speed up** concession decisions and **modernise** price-setting, contract management

Bill will give more **flexibility** to exchange and dispose of conservation land

The Bill also contains some more minor and technical changes to modernise conservation laws, which have not been substantially amended since the 1990s.

Bill will **enable charging** international visitors for access in some areas

For all reform areas, Bill will set out **steps to comply with section 4** (supported by operational policy and guidance)

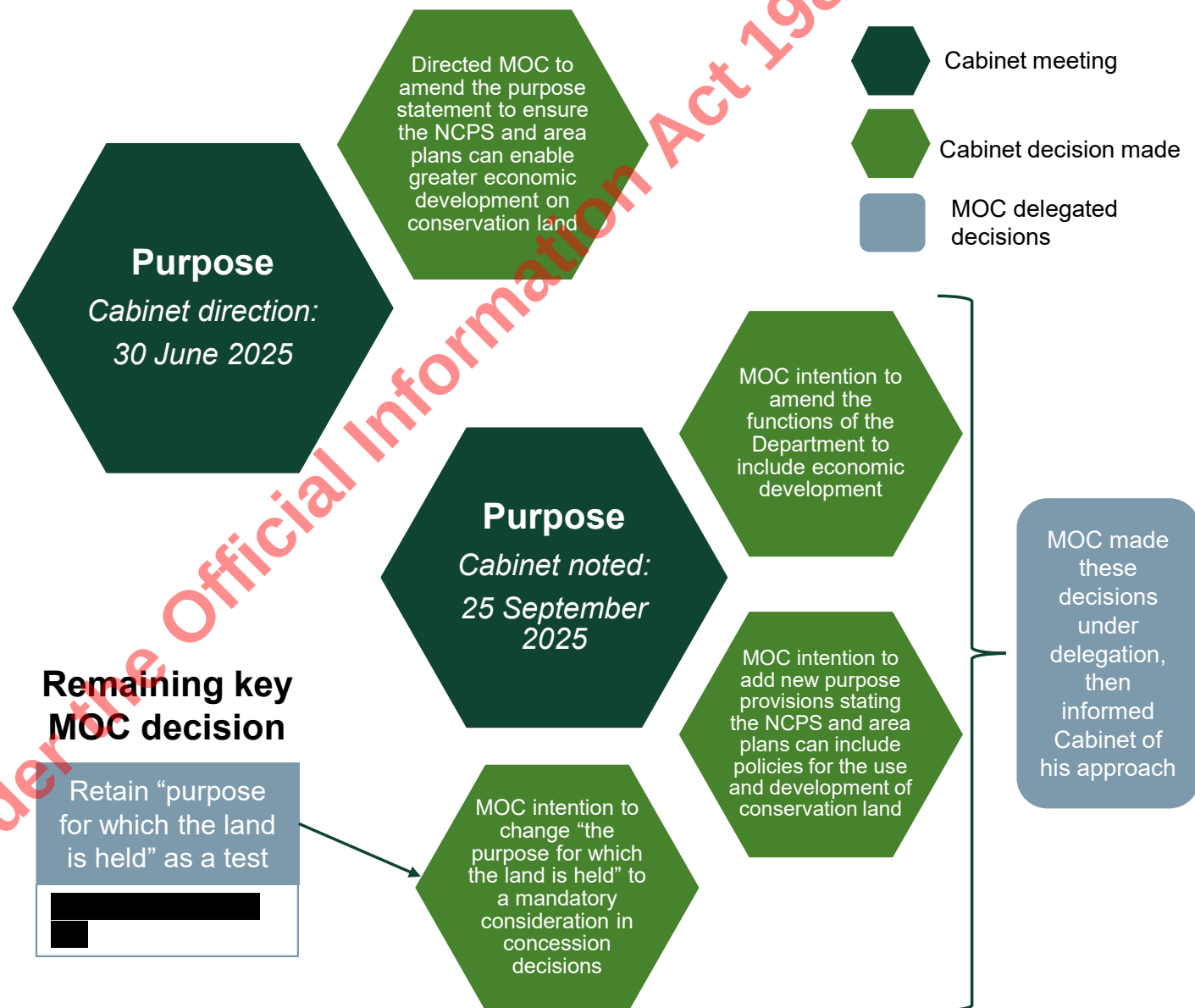
For all reform areas, Bill will demonstrate how reform can be done in a way that **upholds settlement redress and MACA rights**

There are also connections to broader work underway across Government: the review into Treaty references in legislation, and the approach to upholding settlements and MACA rights in RM reform.

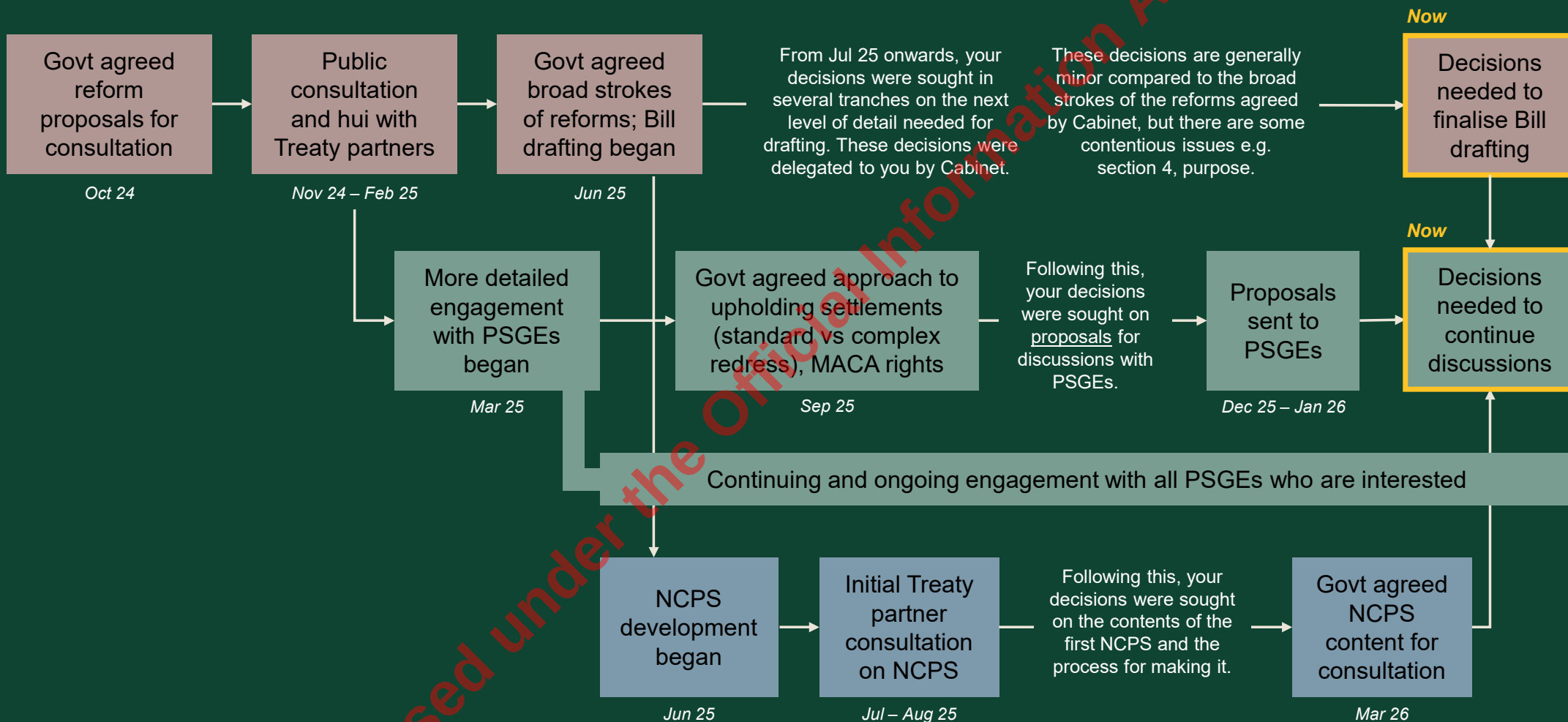
The purpose of the Conservation Act

Intended outcomes:

Supporting economic growth and businesses on conservation land



The path to date



Talking points prepared by the Minister of Conservation's office for Minister Bishop for the Cabinet Legislation Committee meeting on 30 April

Received by DOC: 30 April 2026

Talking Points on Conservation Amendment Bill

- Following the discussion at Cabinet on Tuesday, I have worked with Ministers Potaka and Jones to agree alternative wording for section 6(e) of the Bill – which sets out the functions of the Department of Conservation - to better reflect the Government's intention for greater economic development of Public Conservation Land whilst managing the legal risk.
- This wording would be mimicked in section 13D – the purpose of the National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) and throughout the Bill as required.

PROPOSED DRAFTING TO BE TABLED AT LEG

Section 6 amended (Functions of Department)

Replace section 6(e) with:

(e) also to recognise the economic opportunities that arise from the use and development of [land and other natural and historic resources managed by the Department], and enable this use and development to the greatest extent practicable under this Act and other enactments

New section 13D (National Conservation Policy Statement)

(2) The purpose of the NCPS is to—

(b) recognise the economic opportunities that arise from the use and development of land vested in the Crown and held under this Act, the National Parks Act 1980, the Reserves Act 1977, and the Wildlife Act 1953 and enable that use and development to the greatest extent practicable under these Acts

- This drafting goes as far as possible to create a clear and certain signal in favour of economic development. s9(2)(h)
- It clearly and strongly signals in the direction of economic development. It gives statutory legitimacy to a range of economic development activities broader than tourism and provides a stronger hook in the Act to support policies in the NCPS that are more enabling of economic development.
- I seek delegated authority for PCO to refine the wording and make consequential amendments to ensure consistency throughout the Bill, as a result of this change.

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Full set of Recommendations to be tabled (provided to the Cabinet Office)

- 1 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 2 note that the Bill will streamline the conservation land management framework, better enable appropriate use of conservation land, and support more effective administration of conservation land;
- 3 approve additional proposals for the Bill as set out in the paper and Appendix A under the submission CAB-26-SUB-0141;
- 4 note the policy decisions made during drafting, consistent with Cabinet's earlier delegations, which are set out in Appendix B to the submission under CAB-26-SUB-0141;
- 5 note that no change to the threshold that must be met in concession decisions (relating to the purpose for which the land is held) has been made, s9(2)(h) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 6 agree to amend the Bill to clarify earlier policy decisions around enabling greater economic development on conservation land, to recognise the economic opportunities that arise from the use and development of land and other natural and historic resources managed by the Department, and enable this use and development to the greatest extent practicable under this Act and other enactments, in new sections 6(e) and 13D of the Bill, and related purpose statements as appropriate;
- 7 authorise the Minister of Conservation, with advice from PCO, to approve the final wording used in the Bill to give effect to the decision in paragraph 6 above;
- 8 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 9 authorise the Parliamentary Counsel Office to continue to make minor and technical changes to the Bill, in line with Cabinet policy decisions, up until the Bill is introduced;
- 10 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 11 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 12 [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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BACKPOCKET POINTS

The proposed reforms will enable more economic development

- Cabinet agreed in September last year, that the intention of the proposed reform is to further enable economic development on conservation land, while retaining conservation as the primary purpose of the Conservation Act [CAB-25-MIN-0334.01].
- This will be achieved through incisive changes to the functions of the Department of Conservation and Parts 3A and 3B to ensure the National Conservation Policy Statement (NCPS) and area plans can contain more enabling policies, and those flow through into concession decisions.
- The revised drafting achieves this intention. Moreover the reforms implement changes within the current restrictions of Conservation legislation to enable development by:
 - Allowing for easier land exchange and disposal – so low value conservation land can be removed from the Conservation estate and used for its best use.
 - Reforming the complicated planning system and greenlighting certain activities
 - Promoting more activities on conservation land by providing exemptions and pre-approvals
 - Putting the acid on DOC by creating statutory timeframes for processing applications
 - Removing unnecessary rules will encourage operators who are currently hesitant to apply for concessions.

There are fast pathways for economic projects to get approval to operate on conservation land

- Economic activities already occur on conservation land, and major economic activities have fast pathways for authorisation. The pathway they take depends on their nature and scale:
 - **The Fast-track Approvals Act 2024** provides a pathway for economically significant activities to seek a range of approvals through a single application.
 - Mining is primarily regulated under the **Crown Minerals Act 1991** rather than the Conservation Act. DOC typically approves the mining applications it processes under that Act.
 - From November 2024 – October 2025, DOC processed 120 applications under the Crown Minerals Act to access PCL for mining-related activities. Of these, 90% were approved; 1.7% were declined; 6.7% were withdrawn; and 1.7% were returned
 - Most remaining activities on conservation land need a concession. The **concessions process is set out in the Conservation Act**, but it is referred to and used under other conservation legislation (e.g. the National Parks Act and Reserves Act).

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A rebalancing of conservation and economic development could be achieved through further reform but will take significant time and resources

- For the purposes of this reform package, the Minister of Conservation has considered and discounted options that look to insert balancing provisions into the current Conservation Act. s9(2)(h) [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
 - s9(2)(h) [redacted]
[redacted]
 - s9(2)(h) [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
- If Ministers are seeking significantly more economic development on conservation land, it is possible, however it requires a fundamental redesign of the conservation system. Due to the extensive time and resources required, this would not be achievable this term. s9(2)(h) [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
- This is because the conservation purpose of the conservation system is deeply embedded through all conservation legislation.
- Fundamentally shifting the balance of conservation and development is not possible without repealing and replacing much of the conservation statute book.
- It would be more than solely amending the Conservation Act, s9(2)(h) [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

s9(2)(h)

Revised drafting

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