

NEW ZEALAND

CONSERVATION AUTHORITY
TE POU ATAWHAI TAIAO O AOTEAROA

27 October 2017

Hon Eugenie Sage
Minister of Conservation
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

Dear Minister

General Election 2017 – Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Conservation

Congratulations on your appointment and welcome to the Conservation portfolio. The New Zealand Conservation Authority (the Authority) looks forward to working closely with you.

The Authority is established by the Conservation Act 1987, with members appointed by the Minister of Conservation. It has a range of functions, but primarily acts as an independent conservation advisor to you and the Director-General. Current members are listed in Attachment 1.

The Authority provides strategic advice to you, advocates on matters of national significance to conservation, and advises the Director-General and senior leadership team on the Department of Conservation's strategic direction and performance. For example, in the last 12 months we have:

- recommended the Mokihinui area be added to the Kahurangi National Park; made input to the Department's plan for increasing investment from business, and ensuring a "biodiversity dividend" is secured from this;
- encouraged the Department to explore opportunities for conservation land to make a larger contribution to mitigating climate change and improving water quality;
- advocated for a border levy on international visitors to pay for increased tourism effects on the Department's infrastructure and services;
- advised the Minister on the public's concerns about over-fishing of whitebait and ways that this could be addressed; and,
- advised the Minister on the Federation of Mountain Clubs' (FMC) proposal to create a Remarkables National Park.

We support greater cooperation and community involvement across the National Resources Sector and, within this context, have made input to the *Conservation and Environment Science* roadmap, and encouraged stronger alignment of the Department with LINZ, MPI and MfE. With regard to this, we do not believe the current settings for the Endeavour Fund for contestable science are correctly aligned to either the Roadmap or the Department's 2025 priorities; and accordingly, should be reviewed to ensure better value for money and impact in relation to conservation.

Conservation resources represent a significant portion of New Zealand's natural capital and capacity to meet its Paris 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution. The Authority believes investment in them is necessary to sustain them for future generations of New Zealanders to enjoy and benefit from. The Predator Free 2050 initiative is a good example – the

Parliamentary Commissioner of the Environment (PCE) in her May 2017 report *Taonga of an island nation: Saving New Zealand's birds* identified 80% of our indigenous birds are in trouble. Her findings reconfirmed the eradication of predators at a landscape scale on the mainland and from offshore islands is vital to the survival of our large list of threatened flora and fauna. The Authority strongly holds the view that the momentum built over recent years to apply 1080 over large areas of the Conservation Estate must be sustained, and that the collaboration between the Department with Maori and private land owners be increased to substantially reduce, and eventually eliminate, the primary predators – rats, stoats and possums (and wild cats) – from our country.

For similar reasons, the Authority supports research into new ways of eradicating pests and weeds; and in this respect, it is taking a close interest in assessing the potential of new genetic technologies (such as gene editing) to address long-term, expensive problems, such as wilding pines (via sterility), and to address biosecurity threats such as kauri dieback and myrtle rust (via disease tolerance).

The Authority's **five strategic priority areas** for its current term (ending 30 June 2020, see Attachment 2) are:

- advocate for a **coherent national visitor plan** that anticipates and suitably resources increased visitor use of conservation areas (and that this plan should sensibly be able to be layered down and linked with other initiatives supporting regional economic development);
- push for **improved water quality and protection of wild rivers** to provide habitat (such as wetlands) for threatened freshwater biodiversity (especially whitebait and long-fin eel) and public recreation;
- seek legislative improvements (and more resources) for the **marine sector**;
- enhance **threatened species protection** by boosting control of pests of both flora and fauna and supporting the assessment of new technologies such as 'gene drive'; and,
- **mitigate and adapt to climate change** such as understanding effects on biodiversity, incorporating extreme weather hazards on Department capital asset management plans; and, growing carbon sequestration on conservation lands.

We will also engage with the Department of Conservation on:


- 1. Finalising Conservation Management Strategies (CMSs) and National Park Plans** as quickly as practicable. We expect the new CMS for Wellington and East Coast Hawke's Bay within the next year and, the plans for the Westland *Tai Poutini* and Aoraki National Parks. The Authority is continuing to push for smarter, quicker planning processes and would like to see already drafted legislative changes passed in order to make the review and renewal of CMS and Park plans more flexible than the current mandated 10 years. We support the Department's plan to boost its planning capacity to enable this work to occur faster and believe this area, along with pest control and ensuring compliance by concessionaires and users of the Department's assets, merits new baseline Budget funding.
- 2. Treaty of Waitangi settlements and conservation in the post-Treaty Settlement era:** The Authority is required to consider Treaty matters under Section 4 of the Conservation Act. With many settlements in recent years (and several in negotiation), a larger part of our portfolio of work is building partnerships with iwi. We are focused increasingly on what conservation looks like in the post-Treaty Settlement era and have lead discussions with the Office of Treaty Settlements and the Department on the elements that constitute a successful, partnership. We see considerable scope for enhanced conservation outcomes via Crown-Maori partnerships.

3. **Recategorisation of stewardship land:** The Authority is concerned that the Department attend the issue of stewardship land with more urgency, especially with respect to the recommendations in the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's 2013 report (*Investigating the future of conservation: The case of stewardship land*). A formal assessment of the conservation benefit of some stewardship land may show it has relatively low conservation values and would best be disposed of in order to achieve greater conservation gains in other areas. The increased planning capacity described in 1. above will also assist land recategorization and the work that Department has started on the development of an overall national land portfolio.
4. **Ensuring legislation (and related general policies) for Conservation remains 'fit for purpose':** The Authority believes it is timely to review whether conservation legislation (primarily the Wildlife Act 1953, the Reserves Act 1977, the National Parks Act 1980, and the Conservation Act 1987) remains 'fit for purpose' or whether reform is required to streamline processes (thereby delivering costs savings and greater certainty of time and process), and otherwise promote conservation and sustainable management of public conservation lands in the 21st century. In support of this **we will be reviewing the General Policy for National Parks**; the terms of reference for this were adopted in October 2017. The current version was published in 2005, and the Authority wants to ensure that it properly reflects post-Treaty settlement decisions around the management of national parks, and the criteria for conservation planning reflect new computing technology and public access to information. It is anticipated that a final draft will be provided for your comments/input before the end of 2018.
5. **Growing partnerships with the private sector and volunteer groups:** We support the Department's strategy to partner with business and community volunteers; and applaud progress made to date. We want to ensure business partnerships achieve a net gain for conservation investment over and above that currently achieved by the Department and that a tangible biodiversity and/or biosecurity 'dividend' for New Zealand is realised. Recent research suggests this is not always the case.

We would like to meet with you as soon as possible to introduce ourselves and learn about your priorities. The Authority would appreciate a regular exchange of ideas with you, including in person, on issues of significance to conservation. Also, as Chair, I have found regular meetings with the Minister to be very useful. I suggest we continue this tradition to keep abreast of the key matters each of us is considering and ensure the Authority continues to fulfill its functions expertly.

We do hope you will be able to attend our meeting in Wellington on 4-5 December, perhaps for a conversation over dinner on the Monday evening?

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Warren Parker". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Dr Warren Parker
Chairperson

Membership of the New Zealand Conservation Authority as at 1 October 2017

In consultation with the Minister of Maori Affairs:

- Mita Harris of Kerikeri
- Rauru Kirikiri of Wellington

In consultation with the Minister of Tourism:

- Warren Parker of Rotorua (Chairperson)
- Kerry Prendergast of Wellington

In consultation with the Minister of Local Government:

- Jan Riddell of Winton

On the nomination of Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu:

- Sandra Cook of Otautau and Christchurch

On the recommendation of Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand:

- Gerry McSweeney of South Westland and Arthurs Pass

On the recommendation of Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand:

- David Barnes of Lower Hutt

On the recommendation of the Royal Society of New Zealand:

- Mick Clout of Auckland

From public nominations:

- Mark Brough of the King Country
- Mark Christensen of Christchurch
- Robyn Jebson of South Westland
- Tony Lepper of Alexandra

The New Zealand Conservation Authority's Strategic Priorities

STATUTORY ROLE FOR MANAGEMENT PLANNING AND LAND STATUS
A. Conservation Management Strategies
B. National Park Management Plans
C. Land status recategorisation e.g. stewardship land
D. Treaty of Waitangi and post-Treaty settlement conservation management
INFLUENCE AND 'STEP CHANGE'
E. Strategic advice to the Minister and DG in the context of conservation in today's economy, the governance requirements, and strategic advice on public policy documents and legislation
F. Opportunities for step change in conservation: pests/weeds/biosecurity
G. Marine ecosystems and protected areas
ADVOCACY ON NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FOR CONSERVATION
H. Climate change adaptation and mitigation
I. Rivers and freshwater ecosystems
MONITORING AND EVALUATION
J. Effectiveness of the Department's conservation management
K. NZCA's performance