

## Environment Reporting Bill

Based on the experience I had as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment ( ) and being involved in several of the OECD State of the Environment Reports, I am wholeheartedly in support of this Bill.

The report needs to be credible and thus independence in checking data and presentation of material should be done by the PCE who must be adequately resourced.

Regular reporting on a **5 year time scale** seems appropriate.

The following comments relate to the MfE Discussion document "Measuring Up Environmental Reporting".

Monitoring data is the difficult area. Monitoring gathered on a national basis can tell the world about the degradation, pollution or clean and green state of our air, land and water. It checks on compliance. Monitoring ought to also be able to constitute an **early warning system** so we identify unfavourable **ecosystem** change BEFORE it becomes a problem. This will depend on identifying key indicators. During my term of Office there were scientists who could tell us the first species that recolonised a recovering ecosystem but they could NOT tell us what were the first species to disappear.

In order to better understand ecosystems and recognize changes the Landcare, Coast Care and Water Care groups were established in the 1990s. Unfortunately most of these groups with the exception of some High Country Landcare groups have not been maintained. I find it ironic that the NZ Futures Trust identified twenty years ago that community values and involvement were the key to sound environmental management. ( Environment and Development in New Zealand 1992/3)

In many cases these monitoring groups with the help of scientists and Local Government identified key indicator species for early warning signs of unacceptable change and some of these are used by Local Government today. However what is appropriate for one region is not for another area. Seeking to standardize indicator species nationwide is NOT a good idea.

A recent workshop organized by the Royal Society of New Zealand on August 9,2011 identified that an Ecosystem Service approach helps to identify and quantify the ecological and socio-economic trade-offs and synergies on which decision-making should be based. (Costanza,R et al "The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital" Nature 1997 v.387 p.253-260.) The focus for environmental reporting should be our **ecosystems**.

Monitoring programs serve distinct purposes 1) a measure of degradation 2) compliance and 3 ) an early warning system. Data collected for only one purpose is unlikely to be the most suitable for a national data base. Complicating monitoring programs is the fact that our ecosystems are constantly changing and evolving without the help of humans. We are a young dynamic country and identifying the best indicators is a challenge. Each

region has representative ecosystems and many have historical data. It is possible in many cases to report on the environmental health of a region and to identify trends.

A **variation index** for representative ecosystems would enable a national picture of environmental change to be evaluated and reported.

If Monitoring Programs are mandatory, there should be a requirement to report on trends over the past medium term. That should mean we avoid having the same environmental problems recurring at 10, 20 and 40 year intervals. We keep reinventing the wheel and its time this stopped and our environmental management prevents degradation of ecosystems and particularly recurring degradation. I am reminded of the Rotorua Lakes where I worked on the same environmental problems in DSIR in the 1970s, in the Commission for the Environment in the 1980s and see reported on by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment in the last decade.

In terms of prioritizing environmental domains land and water are interrelated and form a range of ecosystems.

**Identifying representative ecosystems of different regions should be a priority.**