



New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Ltd  
 Submission to the Ministry for the Environment  
**Measuring up**  
**Environmental reporting – a discussion document**  
**Proposed Environmental Reporting Bill**

18 October 2011

Introduction

1. The New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Ltd (SeaFIC) welcomes the opportunity to submit on *Measuring up; Environmental reporting – a discussion document* which proposes an Environmental Reporting Bill. SeaFIC is the primary umbrella organisation representing the generic interests of all sectors of the New Zealand seafood industry, including quota owners, fishers, marine farmers, seafood processors, wholesalers, retailers, and exporters. Our shareholders collectively represent around 95% of the seafood industry by value. SeaFIC plays a leading role in developing and presenting the seafood industry’s response on all legislative proposals affecting the industry.

“Not a public relations or advocacy exercise”

2. SeaFIC ‘s view on environmental reporting aligns with that put forward by the Minister for the Environment in his foreword to the discussion document :

*“It is critical that environmental reporting is a robust, factual assessment – not a public relations or advocacy exercise”*

3. SeaFIC supports the concept of impartial environmental reporting and offers the comments below on the concepts set out in the discussion document.

Independence

4. The discussion document focuses on the need for a state of the environment report to be independent of government (emphasis added). SeaFIC considers that it should also be

independent of sectoral influence; in particular it should not become a vehicle for environmental advocacy.

#### Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

5. This sense of true independence is absent from the assessment provided in the discussion document (pages 17 – 18) of different offices / agencies which could be assigned responsibility for preparing the report. The discussion document favours the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) for the role, apparently on the basis that she is independent of the government. However the statutory role of the PCE is an explicitly pro-environment one. The PCE herself, in her 2011 annual report, recalls that the term “watchdog” was used to describe her office when the role was initially debated in Parliament.
6. Further, the PCE has adopted a “Mission<sup>1</sup>” which makes it clear that she sees her role as “influencing decisions”; this suggests a role more aligned with advocacy than is appropriate for the preparation of a robust, factual and independent state of the environment report.

### **Our mission**

**To maintain or improve the quality of the environment by providing robust independent advice that influences decisions [emphasis added]**

#### Government Statistician / Statistics New Zealand

7. In contrast, the discussion document rejects the Government Statistician for the role, in part because; “the nature of the reporting may not be consistent with the perceived objectivity of the Government Statistician” (discussion document page 18). We find this statement extraordinary, as it appears to favour subjectivity in the authorship of the state of the environment report.

#### SeaFIC View on which Officer should be assigned responsibility

8. The true objectivity of the Government Statistician and the statutory independence of the role (as set out in the Statistics Act) make the Government Statistician well suited to the role of preparing a robust factual assessment of the state of the environment. SeaFIC therefore disagrees with preferred option 1 (on page 20 of the discussion document) and instead supports the Government Statistician being assigned the role (through amendment of the Statistics Act) of preparing a state of the environment report.
9. If the role of producing a state of the environment report is ultimately assigned to the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment then the necessary amendments to the Environment Act 1987 should:
  - a. provide explicit direction on the impartiality of the report and its basis in sound science;
  - b. make it clear that this new responsibility is separate from any aspect of the Environment Act or the Commissioner’s functions which could be construed as involving an element of advocacy;
  - c. ensure that relevant sections of the Act (e.g. the long title; definition of ‘environment’[section 2] ; matters to which regard to be given [section 17]); include

---

<sup>1</sup> PCE 2011 Annual Report

the economic and social needs of people along with such matters as 'intrinsic values of ecosystems'.

### Alternative legal mechanism

10. Recognising that the changes proposed in paragraph 8 - 9 above would involve some restructuring of either the Statistics Act or the Environment Act, an alternative would be to develop a stand-alone Environmental Reporting Act. Such an Act could set out all the requirements for environmental reporting (including such matters as independence/impartiality, content of the report, timing, and tabling the report in Parliament). This would ensure that the officer responsible (which may be one of those canvassed in the discussion document) would have a clear statutory responsibility uncluttered by competing roles under existing legislation.

### Environmental domains

11. If the Act is to specify a set of environmental domains for the state of the environment report then it should include reference to the land – sea interface; particularly the issue of land-based sources of marine pollution.

### Symposium

12. SeaFIC wishes to participate in the proposed symposium to be held on this issue in February 2012

**Contact Person:**

SeaFIC Policy  
New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Ltd