



Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc.

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Ministry for the Environment
Wellington

Proposed National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

We recognize that the health and well-being of our natural environment, ecosystems and indigenous flora and fauna is vital for the health and well-being of our communities. There is value not only in the pristine but also in modified and degraded habitats and ecosystems which make an important contribution to maintaining indigenous biodiversity. We support the restoration and enhancement of remaining ecosystems and indigenous vegetation cover in all environments, including the most modified.

We strongly support local authorities, without delay, taking steps to maintain indigenous biodiversity outside SNAs by creating or adapting policy statements and plans and specifying how they will control and direct subdivision in all areas in order to maintain indigenous biodiversity. For instance, developers have the mistaken belief that land has to be smoothed and flattened for sub-divisions which in many places has meant the destruction by infilling with general detritus of gullies containing healthy habitats of native plant and animal species. It should be mandatory that all native vegetation must be maintained within new subdivisions and that all subsequent landscaping should use native species suitable for the area. Developers remove all vestiges of the natural landscape leaving instead bland, featureless scenery.

We support Objective 6 which recognises the importance of forming partnerships between local authorities, landowners and communities in maintaining and enhancing indigenous biodiversity and which increases communities' understanding of and connection to nature.

Local authorities should also provide for the maintenance of ecological integrity through natural adjustments of habitats and ecosystems and must adopt a precautionary approach toward proposed activities where the effects on indigenous biodiversity are uncertain, unknown or little understood.

This is particularly important with a changing climate and uncertain weather patterns to which all species must try to adapt.

We strongly support 3.17 Increasing indigenous vegetation cover, particularly

(1) Every regional council must assess the percentage of the urban and rural areas in its region that have indigenous vegetation cover.

(4) For urban areas, if the assessment indicates an area has less than 10 per cent indigenous vegetation cover, the regional council must include in its regional policy

statement a target (expressed as a percentage figure within a specified time) for increasing indigenous vegetation cover in that area to at least 10 per cent of the area. (7) Every regional council must include objectives, policies or methods for increasing indigenous vegetation cover in its region and for achieving the targets set under this clause, giving priority to all of the following:

a) areas to which clause 3.16 applies: (promoting the restoration and enhancement of degraded SNAs, areas that provide important connectivity or buffering functions, wetlands and former wetlands.)

b) areas representative of ecosystems naturally and formerly present:

c) ensuring species richness:

d) restoration and enhancement at a landscape scale across the region.

Regional councils must, by working with territorial authorities, relevant agencies and tangata whenua, develop a monitoring plan for indigenous biodiversity in their regions and each of their districts.

Key assessment principles

This should result in identification of indigenous habitats and species that are representative of the full range and extent of ecological diversity across all environmental gradients in an ecological district. The ecological character and pattern of the indigenous vegetation in the ecological district should be described in terms of the ecological units present, which are a combination of the indigenous vegetation types present plus the landform it occurs on.

We support the proposal to raise the status of an area outside an SNA when it is assessed as significant indigenous vegetation and habitat by mandating a local authority to manage any adverse effects in the area as if it were an SNA.

Ecologically significant freshwater environments.

High priority should be given to further the work confirming the most appropriate method for identifying areas of significant indigenous vegetation and habitat in this environment including indigenous fauna itself, as opposed to the water it lives in. National policy direction is urgently required.

Apparently, private land has the highest proportion of acutely threatened environments with less than 10 per cent indigenous forest cover remaining. There is also a high proportion of indigenous forest that is chronically threatened with 10–20% remaining vegetation cover and 3.1% of total land area.

We support every opportunity being given to landowners and communities to restore and enhance forests, wetlands, coastal areas and corridors or buffers through urban areas to connect isolated or outlying forest and wetland habitats.

Signed:

Gillian Pollock
Branch secretary