He kura koiora I hokia: a discussion document on a proposed NATIONAL STATEMENT INDEGENOUS BIODIVERSITY POLICY

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We farm at Teviotdale in Amberley, North Canterbury and have been farming here since 2011. The farm is 1398 hectares.

Background:

We purchased the farm in 2011 from the Greenwood family, which had owned the property since 1842. The farm was run by a Family Trust and the property was very run down. There had been financial restraints, which meant that important farming practices were significantly underfunded by the trust. Practices such as quality fencing, a reliable water supply, pest control and weed management. Nassella tussock, gorse, old man’s beard and broom were some of the major weeds which have required extensive work and cost to regain control over since we brought the farm in 2011. Stock was free to graze anywhere and the main source of water for the stock, was free access to the Waipara River. When we took over the property, part of the purchase was the existing AMF Rights in the Waipara River bed. (Ad Medium Filum) which entitled the owners to graze and for stock to drink from the riverbed. Within the first year we fenced the boundary between the river and the farm to exclude stock from the river. Teviotdale has 20kms of river boundary and 6kms of beach boundary, we took the initiative to fence these areas ourselves as we value the importance of keeping stock out of these areas.

We employed an engineering team to design a water supply to suit the layout of the farm, which included installing 200 water troughs, thus removing the need for the stock to seek water from the Waipara River.
When we took over Teviotdale, the annual farm budget had $15,000/year for weed and pest control. As you can imagine, on a property of this size this was making very little impact. We commenced a weed control programme, which included using helicopters, tractors and men on foot for spraying. Since taking over the farm we have increased our weed and pest control budget to $55,000/year and it is fair to say we are now only getting on top of the weed situation; however this requires constant management to prevent the weeds and pests from getting out of control.

Fencing was a real issue, as we had no control over stock getting into the river, creeks and wetlands, We have since re-fenced most of the farm and have also fenced off what we believe are significant wetland areas.

This property has a mix of types of soils and terrains, which we have to respect, to get the best out for the farm and also to maintain the quality of the soil types. Weather plays a large part in where we graze stock. We have a mix of rugged hill country, some of which is still in its native grasses, to rolling hills, terrace country, flat terraces to sandy beach ground. The way the farm is grazed and maintained is based on the seasonal weather, and the safety of both stock and staff.

We have planted both native areas and pinetrees on parts of the farm, in areas which were not suitable to graze or are prone to wind and weather damage. We also have SNA’s currently on the property and we farm around these areas

Summary

From the above introduction, it is obvious that we are farmers who care about the land, its adjoining rivers and sea frontage and who have to work within the constraints off the terrain on the property. I believe we are, like most farmers environmentalists. It would be impossible to redevelopment a large area of the farm, due to the terrain and soil types, so we respect this area of the farm for what it is.
The Grand Parenting Proposal which is being included in this policy would have a negative action for this property and our farming practice. At present we employ 5 full time staff. Not only would their jobs be affected, but it would turn a farm, which is farming positively to the restraints of current RMAs and consent rules, into a farm which would go backwards, and the weeds and pests would become out of control as we would not have the income to supplement with our present farming practise.

A statement made by our Agri-Consultant describes our farming practise as

“Teviotdale is farm with the future in mind and an objective of running a profitable farming enterprise, that also delivers appropriate environmental and social outcomes for both those who live on the property and the community it surrounds”

I believe this statement sums up our farming practise. I don’t believe there can be one rule for everyone, as no province or district in NZ can farm in the exact same way. No one rule works in any other form of business, so why would it work in farming, when climate, catchments and terrain are the main restraints. There are so many challenges at present farming in this environment without having further biodiversity rules, which have not had enough public debate. It feels like government is trying to slip this policy through the system, as most farmers are still focused on the Fresh Water policy.

At present we as farmers in Canterbury are working with ECAN. For a number of years farmers have felt that ECAN does not work with the farmers but is against them. I believe this perspective is only starting to change now. We are seeing a shift within our local governing bodies to work and understand each farming business and area as individual farms not as a collective, giving farmers the opportunity to discuss their own property and make practical changes to comply with the rules and regulations and with the farm itself. In a way similar to the Old Catchment Boards, who understood the needs of each
catchment within their area, we would make more progress in the biodiversity field. I believe the same situation applies to this new policy.

This new policy needs to be slowed down, there needs to be more public discussion, as this does not only affect farmers, but the communities who work with and live near these areas.