

Submission on the publicly notified draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity.

**On:** Ministry for the Environment – draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity.

**To:** Ministry for the Environment

### Personal Information

*\* indicates required fields*

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## Submission

- Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity.

## Why am I making this submission?

- *My background is that my wife and I have a rural lifestyle block upon which we have a small dairy support operation. We also operate a small community plant nursery under the name of ██████████ ██████████, an organisation I established about six years ago. Our mission is to assist farmers with riparian planting in our part of the ██████████ ██████████, to assist with restoration of the health of the harbour. This submission is in my own behalf, not that of the society.*
- *I am also an elected member of the Kaipara District Council but this submission should not be construed as representing the council's views.*
- *I am in broad agreement with the ultimate outcome sought by the NPSIB, but I have real concerns that the implementation will be counter-productive, and be yet one more bullet for the farming community to have to dodge.*

## Section A: General responses to the proposals:

- I support the overall goal of the proposals that recognise the value of indigenous biodiversity to New Zealand, its people, and communities, and to ensure that Indigenous Biodiversity is protected, and where it has been significantly lost is restored.
- New Zealand farmers have retained 2.7 million hectares of indigenous habitat within their farms which is testament to the value farmers place on indigenous biodiversity. A total of 24% of New Zealand's total indigenous habitats occurs on the 8.8 million hectares covered by sheep and beef farms, with over 47% of QEII covenants being on sheep and beef farms. The area of indigenous habitats formally protected by QEII, Ngā Whenua Rāhui, and other covenants is growing.
- I support provisions which recognise that for conservation actions to be enduring, they require landowner and community support and leadership. Policies need to recognise that the people on the land are critical to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, and acknowledge the importance of respecting and fostering the contribution of landowners as guardians and Kaitiaki to these habitats and species.
- However, I oppose provisions which seek to 'lock up indigenous biodiversity' and in so doing penalise those landowners who have done the most to protect indigenous biodiversity. I seek changes to the policy to ensure that indigenous biodiversity can be integrated within pastoral based land uses and activities, and which recognise these can co-exist for mutual benefit.
- Indigenous biodiversity should be considered as an asset to the farming business, and communities, and not as a liability. Subtle but significant changes to the NPSIB are required to ensure that existing conservation efforts are rewarded, and ongoing conservation is

supported and incentivised. The recognition of the values of indigenous biodiversity as part of pastoral based landscapes and farming businesses is required to ensure that these values, habitats, and species, are sustainably managed. A strong regulatory or stick approach to the recognition and ongoing management of indigenous biodiversity could, if not carefully constructed, undermine existing and future conservation efforts.

- My vision is that indigenous areas, especially wetlands, are cherished and celebrated; that people with such features on their land consider themselves lucky because they have something special to take care of, something which adds to the value of their property, rather than being seen as yet another way for central and local government to interfere in the peaceful use and enjoyment of their land.

## Section B: Impacts and implementation:

- I am deeply concerned about the potential impacts of these proposals in relation to areas being identified as Significant Natural Areas (SNA's), areas identified as being important for the protection of SNA's which may include land adjacent to SNA's, and the identification of highly mobile species, in relation to the impacts this may have on farming businesses and their resilience and viability. The provisions could be interpreted as precluding the ongoing grazing of animals adjacent to and within these areas, which means that those that have done the most to protect indigenous habitats and species within their farming businesses could shoulder the greatest costs including restrictions to their farming businesses.
- The compliance costs of the various proposals are likely to be significant and include the identification of these habitats and species, fencing of these habitats (could require deer fencing to manage wild populations), and ongoing pest management. As currently proposed, it is unclear where these costs fall. It would help if financial, technical, and human resourcing support is provided to assist landowners to continue to protect and restore indigenous habitats and populations within their farming businesses and communities. Support should be provided to not only areas where indigenous biodiversity is being restored, but also to where it currently exists. I find the cost implications particularly scary. There will be a significant cost associated with identifying and describing SNAs, a cost to fall upon the local regional and district councils, which means ultimately a cost back to the ratepayers, including those who are having to deal with the costs to their farming business by this proposed regulatory regime.
- I understand that there may be in excess of 700 SNAs within our district; I predict that the cost of formally identifying these, and cost of developing and completing a plan change to give effect to the NPSIB will easily run into seven figures. From previous experience, the process will be full of controversy and challenges every step along the way, so it won't come cheap. Now bear in mind that \$350,000 represents approximately 1% on the rates, and that's without allowing for the ongoing costs of monitoring and maintaining records and changes. We have a large land area with a small rating base. Local government is used to central government solving problems by giving them to local government without the resources to implement them. Will central government be coming to the party this time?
- I am concerned that New Zealand does not currently have the extent of technical expertise available to assist regional and district councils to identify SNA's and mobile species across their territorial areas within the next five years, to ground truth this work, and to work with farmers. The requirements on regional and district councils including timeframes should

ensure that the identification of these habitats and species is robust, and is undertaken in a way which engages landowners and communities, builds understanding and knowledge, and which empowers local conservation efforts.

- I have a suggestion here – a key element of the freshwater reform proposals released a couple earlier last year was the development of Farm Environment Plans. Here is what I wrote in my submission about that:
- **Farm Environment Plans**

*I found this quote on the Opportunities Party website:*

- *Regardless, new tools and a new industry of farm environment advisers will need to be created to work with farmers on their Farm Environment Plans. Given the complexity of the issues and the individuality of different farms, this will be difficult to avoid. While the Government has invested money in Overseer – the likely tool for measuring water quality improvements – it has done very little to build the support industry that will no doubt be needed. It may sound like a bizarre concept, but the farming industry needs an independent source of advice that isn't tied to the big fertiliser companies. Besides, we used to have state farm advisers back in the day!*
- *Even if we had an army of farm advisers, there are legitimate questions over how Farm Environment Plans could be enforced. Will they be legally binding? And of course, environmental organisations are worried that if they aren't binding, they will be no more than scraps of paper with nice words.*
- *In short, government bureaucrats have put enormous effort into an emissions proposal that will do bugger all, whereas the comparatively massive issue of water quality is being tackled head on with very little detail. No wonder farmers are pissed off!*
- *This touches on a number of concerns I have regarding creating and implementing Farm Environment Plans (FEPs). The resourcing to get the FEPs drawn up does not seem to be addressed. As I understand it, there is a waiting list of several months for those dairy farmers who want to get their FEP drawn up, and regional council staff are also at full stretch and overcommitted. More advisory staff with the right theoretical and practical local knowledge will need to be found from somewhere.*
- *FEPs need to be customised for each individual farm, but a consistent catchment-based approach also needs to be taken. The combination of factors such as soil type, slope, aspect, vegetative cover and existing land use all need to be taken into account for each property. While the contents of a FEP may need to be specified nationally, it should allow (indeed encourage) innovation rather than just plugging in a formula.*
- ***Above all though, the most critical point is that for this programme to be a success, the farmers must 'buy in' to it. The alternative is an army of enforcement officers and a sub-optimum outcome.***
- *My suggestion is that you encourage farmers in the direction of the existing options for FEPs from Dairy NZ, Beef+Lamb and regional councils, and set a time frame for getting everyone signed up after receiving advice from those organisations as to how long it could reasonably be expected to take to get the required FEPs drawn up with the resources which could reasonably be expected to be brought to bear. These, along with the FEPs which have already been drawn up will be of a wide variety of standards and may not be the most consistent in terms of catchment benefits, but a start will have been made, and they will be the farmer's plans, not the government's.*
- *Once the plans are in operation, farmers will have the opportunity to see the benefits (as well as the costs) and be able to plan for the future with greater certainty. As soon as the first iteration of plans is completed it would be time to commence the next iteration with the government able to set the high level agenda for it in consultation with industry organisations such as Dairy NZ and B+L.*

- **Stock exclusion**  
*Any rules on fencing setbacks need to take a practical approach to mitigating effects rather than a specific measured distance. An 'average' distance would also run into measurement difficulties. Some guidelines could be provided, but the detail is best left to the FEP to finalise.*
- **Cherish Wetlands**  
*I must declare that I am an enthusiast not an expert on ecological matters, but I wish we could find a way to get rural landowners to value, appreciate, even love their wetlands so much that would want to protect them as well as using them to provide ecological services for their farming operations. They might not look as spectacular as an area of pristine forest, but I suggest that ecologically they are more important in terms of the habitat they provide and the function they can perform. For mitigating effects and improving water quality it may be that restoring the health of a few wetlands on a farm is more valuable than fencing waterways – rather than spending tens of thousands on fencing in difficult hilly country, the answer might be to fence off a boggy area at the bottom of a gully, do a bit of enhancement planting and let nature do the rest.*
- *It may become apparent on a property that the most effective solution is to construct a wetland if none is present; and rules which might be involved need to make it easy for farmers to adopt this option.*
- **Drainage Networks**  
*Many farms have developed a network of surface and sub-surface drains over the years. It needs to be possible for these drains to be maintained in future. Many surface drains are fenced from stock to prevent them falling in. One thing that could be encouraged though, is the inclusion of silt detention structures in the networks. This might amount to nothing more than widening out the drain bed at its lower end in some cases, or making sure that alternate sections of drain are cleaned each year so there is always some vegetation in the drain to trap silt. These are details which can be included in a FEP. [end of outtake]*

My suggestion is that you use the system of Farm Environment Plans developed with the participation of the landowners to give effect not only to the Essential Freshwater package, but also the outcomes sought by the Indigenous Biodiversity NPS.

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14 March 2020