

Submission on National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity

14/03/2020 [REDACTED]

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We all have a responsibility to look after our environment for future generations, both rural and urban New Zealanders

Our environmental record as a whole needs addressing, it is not only our waterways that we should be concentrating on and nor should rural communities bear the brunt of change or political grandstanding. Our mainland native bird population continues to decline through lack of coordinated pest control programmes on Crown and private land. Our native forests and regenerating forests are at real risk of weed invasion (e.g. woolly nightshade, privet, pampas) and from pests such as goats and possums. The wilding pine problem in the Kawekas and the South island high country while being addressed is sadly lacking enough resources to stop the spread. Potentially 20% of our landscape could be covered in wilding pines in the next 2 decades.(reference MPI Farmers Weekly January 2019)

I have farmed in the King Country since 1978 and my wife's family have farmed here since 1928. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Our home farm is predominately beef finishing on [REDACTED] ha. We also have a hill country sheep and beef property of [REDACTED] ha and a [REDACTED] ha forestry block.

I have always had a keen interest in the environment and conservation within our farming operation. Over the last 28 years we have implemented a plan involving [REDACTED] km of fencing around [REDACTED] ha of native bush blocks and [REDACTED] km of permanent streams and wetlands are fenced. We still have more work planned. It is not a 5 year project.

I am involved with the landowner group King Country River Care [KCRC] formed 2 years ago for farmers to have a voice in environmental management and to promote sound sustainable farming practices. We have a close relationship with the Waikato Regional Council. I was on the West Coast Zone committee with the WRC and have been actively involved in land care and pest control programmes in the past. We boundary the Te Mapara Kokako reserve and have a good relationship with DOC staff in assisting with predator control. Our Fenced off areas of bush adjoining the reserves are now relatively predator free and have good numbers of kokako. We have plans to link areas of bush with native planting. This is all voluntary work that is subsidised by DOC and the 1Billion Tree scheme; we would not and could not do this without this assistance.

The whole environmental debate needs to be put into perspective.

We see pedantic and meaningless rules & costs promoted by some Regional and District Councils on activities which have little or no impact on the environment. Often a lack of practical solutions and by not putting issues into perspective whether by DOC, Regional councils or Central Government

have led to poor environmental outcomes. Lack of funding is generally not the problem; it is how issues are being addressed without a practical common sense approach.

Local examples - 20 years ago a small patch of woolly nightshade on a property in the Mokau catchment was allowed to spread in spite of over 100 abatement notices, visits to the farm property and encumbrances of the title by the Regional council. A number of us within our community pleaded with Council to actively control the incursion. It is now widespread and out of control in the catchment including DOCs Mahoenui Giant Weta Reserve.

Mt Messenger Bypass - \$120 Million project important to the Regional development of Taranaki delayed by DOC and Environment Court process at what cost? \$16 Million is planned to bridge a wetland of less than 2ha. (DOC asked for \$200million to control wilding pines. They were given \$19million!) NZTA were pressured to come up with a plan to protect and pest control 3,000ha of adjoining bush. [Ref NZTA Waitomo News March 2019] Why has this area, known to be a North Island Brown Kiwi habitat, been ignored by DOC previously? Why has it suddenly become such a concern now "Extortion".

Is there anywhere else in the world where government departments are so vigorously working against each other?

It is important for the credibility of the Indigenous biodiversity debate to have the same and fair rules for all New Zealanders. We have all had a negative impact on our environment whether we are recent immigrants or have been here many generations. Clearing and burning of our native forest and extinction of our native birds began on a significant scale after Maori arrived in approximately 1300-1400AD. (reference Landmarks Prof. Kenneth Cumberland) To have one group exempt from part of the process is flawed.

In less than a generation we have seen a huge change in attitudes from the public, farmers and governing bodies towards the environment. When I started farming, land was still being cleared of bush on a large scale, the totora, rimu and matai forests of Pureora were being milled, cowshed and piggery effluent went directly into waterways. Mills and factories discharged waste directly into rivers [such as the Kawerau mill into the Tarawera river which ran black and pungent] Sewerage also ran directly into rivers (Waikato) and harbours.

I and many farmers accept the need to improve our environmental impact. A lot of this can be achieved with Regional Councils who have practical and efficient systems and staff who work with farmers and catchment groups. A good example of this is the Taranaki Regional Council.

Farm environment plans are the first stage of what King Country River Care has proposed. Farmers need an all-encompassing plan that covers all environmental aspects such as water quality, native biodiversity, and soil conservation. These plans also need to encompass profitability, traceability, animal welfare, food safety and sustainability. A lot of what farmers are doing is consumer led which promotes higher environmental footprints. We need to have an overall approach from Government and Regional councils, not the pillared type structures in place currently. We also need to recognise the particular values of biodiversity at a local level as we have with KCRC with our goals for water quality and biodiversity on a catchment and sub catchment basis. We need to have the option of

changing land use to maintain our profitability and not be constrained by valueless impositions with consent rulings that have little or no impact on the environment.

Example; I recently visited a [REDACTED] ha family owned market garden operation that had spent over [REDACTED] on getting consent to put in another storage dam for irrigation,. They are still not through the process and have had ridiculous impositions placed upon them such as preventing the felling of a row of pine trees that need to be removed to implement the project. They have been told that bats could be roosting in them in spite of no evidence of bats. They have already fenced off and protected all their waterways and native bush. The surrounding neighbouring areas of native bush and unproductive land are being choked by woolly nightshade, pampas, gorse and privet. Where is the common sense in this?

Already we are constrained to changing land use on our home property through the Governments Proposal on Fresh Water with their grand parenting ruling. We do not need further grand parenting with regard to indigenous biodiversity, nor should we be further penalised because our farming system currently has far less impact on the environment than others.

Management of our property is currently improving without fencing off some areas of native vegetation. Some areas, that are described as SNA's, of steep gulley's and water courses are growing significantly more native vegetation than they were previously. They don't all need fencing off. We are finding Kokako are feeding on pigeon wood in these areas now and also out in open areas close to the bush.

There is pressure from within the industry to improve our environmental impact whether it be from processor or customer requirements right through to expectations from peer groups such as KCRC. New Zealand farmers respond to the right signals. Give them time to adjust.

We need to identify where the real issues are and the total cost to our communities of mitigating environmental impacts. Resources need to be used wisely with the best and most effective delivery on practical meaningful outcomes. Farmers should not have to bear the brunt of all these costs. Farmers will do this work voluntarily as we have, if given support and time.