Submission to the NPS Biodiversity Discussion Document

From: North Canterbury 7387

Phone

My wife and I farm [redacted] of quite steep dry hill country at [redacted], North Canterbury. I am [redacted] years old and have farmed here all my life and the property has been in our family for 100 years.

We winter about [redacted] SU’s of which 85% are sheep (mainly capital stock ewes and replacement ewe hoggets) and 15% beef cattle (predominantly beef cows). This is a low cost, low input operation. We have a paddock called [redacted] which is about 80 years old! The most recent cultivation was about 35 years ago. We use no nitrogen or herbicides. Farmer attitudes have changed - we will not cut down our manuka; we now put beehives there!

As with the Essential Freshwater proposals the Biodiversity proposals are overly prescriptive and penalise landowners who have maintained a high level of biodiversity on their properties. In our case we maintain low grazing pressure and areas of manuka/karaka and silver tussock are regenerating, but locking in current land use practices would be iniquitous. The ability to react to a changing world would be severely restricted and land values would be eroded.

Compliance costs passed on by District and Regional Councils will be onerous and the SNA criteria as proposed is incredibly broad.

We understand that the government has ruled out any compensation for the costs involved in complying with the Biodiversity NPS, because landowners are responsible for the erosion of biodiversity in the first place. This attitude is disturbing - even depressing. Times change: in 1978 the government introduced LDEL’s (Land Development Encouragement Loans) and LIS (Livestock Incentive Scheme) to encourage land development and increase production. The policy worked and the whole country benefitted from the increased export income, but there was a downside in terms of biodiversity, erosion etc.

In the 1960’s and 70’s landowner [redacted] was vilified and threatened with prosecution for not draining his wetland on the Taiteri Plains; in 1986 he was awarded an MBE and his wetland is world renowned.
Currently the government is incentivising a massive increase in the planting of pinus radiata often by multinationals at considerable cost to biodiversity. This will ramp up the risk of devastating fires on the east coasts of both islands putting biodiversity at even greater risk. At the same time millions of dollars are being spent on removing wilding pines. Clearly current government policy lacks coherence and I have no doubt that history will show much of it to be ill-advised (particularly the extensive planting of pine trees).

We live in times of great uncertainty and maintaining a vibrant economy will be essential to meeting the challenges that New Zealand faces now and in the future. Unnecessary compliance costs and inflexible, overly prescriptive policies will cost all New Zealanders and ultimately the environment itself.

I do hope the submission process is not a sham and that farmer concerns are taken seriously. I think the environment minister David Parker is sincere in his quest for greater biodiversity, but fear that the process will become politicised. Dismissing our concerns as yet more farmer whinging would be a cheap shot that could go down well with urban voters. Substantial changes are required to the current proposals - I hope the government has the courage to recognise this and not be overly sensitive to potential accusations of “caving in” or “doing a U turn”. Changing one’s mind in the light of new evidence is a strength not a weakness.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely