

Addressing New Zealand's biodiversity challenge: five recommendations for change

Our native flora and fauna is a Taonga that does much to define us as a nation and the time is right to tackle the big questions around its future management. Good progress is being made in some areas, aided by effective new technology and greater public, corporate and philanthropic attention to and investment in the environment. But business as usual will not be good enough if we are to maintain our unique indigenous biodiversity. It is under threat, and we are losing ground in many cases. We have considered how we could better manage our indigenous biodiversity, with a particular focus on the role and work of regional councils.

Five recommendations for change:

- 1. The need for strong leadership and clarity of roles and responsibilities;**
- 2. The need to agree where we should focus our efforts at national, regional and local level;**
- 3. The importance of a national plan and delivering joined-up action across all players;**
- 4. The need to understand what success looks like, and how to measure it; and**
- 5. The need for modern, fit-for-purpose frameworks, including legislation, to help achieve our goals.**

**We are.
LGNZ.**

< The thinkpiece suggests five ‘shifts’ that we believe will make the greatest difference. Underlying these is the urgent need for active management, including more predator control, and recognition that only a co-ordinated and tenure-neutral approach will succeed against threats to biodiversity. The focus is on leveraging the expertise of regional councils, who are already active in this space, particularly in partnership with private landowners. >

Shift 1 – Stronger leadership and clearer lines of accountability

Why

We need clear leadership for biodiversity, particularly off public conservation land. Clear boundaries are needed about roles and responsibilities of different parties; this will improve accountability. New Zealand’s biodiversity management system requires better leadership.

How

Promote investigation of options for new national leadership models for biodiversity management including a National Biodiversity Management Authority comprising all major statutory and financial stakeholders (including local government and iwi representation) with:

- A governance role (including recommending and overseeing the changes required to enhance performance and ensure on-going clarity of roles and direction); and
- A limited management role. (Establishing priorities and co-ordinating delivery against those priorities; raising awareness of, and financial support for, biodiversity across all sectors; and overseeing the national response to monitoring biodiversity.)

Ensure that any new biodiversity leadership entity has clear mandate from, and is accountable to, government Ministers, preferably through the entity and its roles and function being recognised in statute.

Develop leadership arrangements at the regional level that encourage collaboration in the undertaking of biodiversity responsibilities, including in the planning, prioritisation and implementation of specific projects (using Nature Central as potential model).

Shift 2 – Building on what regional councils do best

Why

Regional councils are regarded by the government, private sector and communities as expert authorities in working with private land owners and iwi in planning and undertaking operational management to achieve “on the ground” action that furthers biodiversity objectives.

How

The core biodiversity management roles of regional councils should be clearly defined and promoted as:

- Investors in, and/or deliverers of, and/or supporters and enablers of operational programmes to protect and improve the ecological integrity of a network of sites off public conservation land that, in combination with sites on the public conservation lands, represent the full range of habitats and ecosystems;
- Regulators of many (but not all) of the activities that effect freshwater and marine habitats; and
- Regulators of activities that affect terrestrial habitats where that role is not undertaken by territorial authorities (with territorial retaining the default role).

Regional councils to promote legislative change that more clearly articulates their role as outlined above.





Shift 3 – Better information for better management

Why

Information on the overall state of New Zealand's biodiversity is poor. At the national level, indicators are not fit-for-purpose and at a regional level monitoring is patchy, with variable indicators used. In the absence of quality, reliable information regional councils and other stakeholders cannot properly target or "size" their intervention, potentially leading to a misallocation of resources. We need to move from piecemeal/case study/ anecdotal information to the use of comprehensive, robust indicators within a systematic monitoring framework.

How

Regional councils agree on the pan sector adoption of a spatial prioritisation tool and on the protocols for the consistent use of that tool to ensure consistency across the sector in the identification of the regional network of sites. (Note that the Zonation software tool is the leading contender having been already used by a number of councils.)

Regional councils promote the use of the same spatial prioritisation tool (and protocols for use) on public conservation land.

Regional councils and DOC effectively and consistently communicate the concept of, and principles underpinning, prioritisation to ensure all stakeholders understand the strategy and its importance in optimising outcomes for New Zealand as a whole.

In developing and funding biodiversity monitoring programmes promote the principles that:

- Those responsible for managing the threat should also be responsible for monitoring the effect of that management intervention (conversely those not responsible for managing the threat ought not be responsible for monitoring the outcome); and
- If an outcome is nationally important then it is important to monitor the achievement of that outcome nationally.

Implement the 18 recommended indicators for terrestrial biodiversity monitoring (including, regardless of the outcome of action 6 below, ensuring monitoring includes adequate state and condition monitoring for all key biodiversity sites).

Consider further the value proposition of investing in the completion of a Tier 1 (broad scale) monitoring system if there is confirmation of:

- Government's long term commitment to a corresponding system on public conservation land; and
- a contribution of the cost of the programme from national agencies that reflects the value of the information for national reporting (relative to any benefits that accrue regionally).

Further develop the regional biodiversity monitoring programme to cover freshwater and marine habitat in a manner similar to that taken for terrestrial environment.

Consider further the feasibility of establishing a data commons for biodiversity information.

Shift 4 – Planning and delivering joined-up action

Why

New Zealand needs to focus on managing threats to a network of sites that represents the full range of ecosystems and habitats and in so doing provides the best chance of maintaining the full range of species. A consistent approach to prioritisation across regional councils and with other players is needed. We need to achieve a strategic shift from the current fragmented and inconsistent approach to help "NZ Inc" invest optimally and achieve maximum benefit from available resources.

How

Prioritise sites for operational management across the region taking a tenure-neutral approach (in conjunction with the Department of Conservation).

Develop operational plans for the management of the regional network sites and projects in collaboration with the Department of Conservation, iwi and community and private sector players. In doing so identify opportunities for synergies and efficiencies in achieving management objectives.

Operate and invest in such a way as to secure an overall increase in the level of funding for biodiversity investment.

Advocate for new biodiversity/conservation planning mechanisms (such a species and habitat management/recovery plans) that take a tenure neutral approach to the identification of required actions and which specify roles for all relevant agencies.

Support and encourage the development, commercialisation and uptake of new technology for more effective and efficient pest management.

Shift 5 – Modern, fit-for-purpose frameworks

Why

The current legislative framework for biodiversity management comprises a patchwork of statutes from different eras and philosophies. There is a lack of coherence, an absence of focus on biodiversity maintenance as a driving purpose and a lack of clarity about respective functions. The legislative framework should provide for clear leadership for biodiversity management and expressly acknowledge and encourage partnerships and collaboration between parties.

How

Advocate for a review of the institutional and legislative framework as it applies to biodiversity management, to ensure it is fit-for-purpose. Such a review should evaluate the value of integrated, single purpose biodiversity management statute, with a values-based purpose of maintaining indigenous biodiversity and with a full suite of functions, powers and tools to be exercised according to consistent principles and processes; and, in the absence of such a broad review:

- Promote reconsideration of how biodiversity is provided for within the Resource Management Act, with a key considerations being whether “the maintenance of biodiversity” ought to be a Part 2 matter rather than a function; and
- Ensure the Conservation Act establishes the “maintenance of biodiversity” as a purpose of the legislation and as a primary role for DOC – including, importantly off the public conservation land (in partnership with others).

Support regional councils being given a function in biodiversity management that transcends the Resource Management Act, acknowledging the non-regulatory and operational focus of regional council’s intervention in managing threats to biodiversity maintenance and restoration.

A copy of the full thinkpiece document is available here: www.bit.ly/LGNZ-Biodiversity

