RMA gets anti-community amendments
By Barry Weeber

‘Simplifying and Streamlining’ Resource Management Amendment Bill is bad news for the community and environment, despite the spin in its title. The Bill should be called the Resource Management (anti community and developer assistance) Bill, since its primary effects are to tilt the RMA’s processes in favour of large projects and against communities.

Submissions on the Bill closed with Parliament’s Local Government and Environment Select Committee on 4 April.

The Bill is Phase One of the National-Act’s RMA ‘reforms’ which would be better termed ‘deforms’. Dr Nick Smith, Minister for the Environment, has been under considerable pressure from his Cabinet colleagues and National’s supporters to savage the Act. So far Part II of the RMA, which provides the Purpose and Principles of the Act, has remained intact, but there are hints that this may be tackled in Phase Two. A paper went to Cabinet on the terms of reference for Phase Two at the end of March 2008.

The Government has presented no information on the environmental impacts of its proposals nor the impacts on communities.

The Government sees submitters, including residents, local community groups and environment groups as holding up development and wants the public out of the way of pet projects such as roads and other infrastructure.

These RMA changes will fast-track large developments and benefit those who can pay for plan changes. It will make little difference to smaller projects. This is similar to the controversial National Development Act which was repealed prior to the passage of the RMA.

The Bill strengthens the role of the Minister for the Environment and downgrades the role of the Minister of Conservation, particularly in relation to coastal management.

Key objectionable elements of the Bill which should not proceed are:

1. Security of costs – this proposal would be a major barrier to environment and community groups and others raising legitimate issues. This change would empower a judge to require objectors to provide potentially tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in a bond before they are allowed to embark on an appeal in the Environment Court. The provision ignores the fact that there is already the ability for the court to dismiss “frivolous and vexatious” objections (s279(4)). Amendment clause 133, which repeals section 284A of the Act, should be deleted.
2. The removal of the decision role of the Minister of Conservation in restricted coastal activities. The Minister of Conservation acts on behalf of the Crown as the “owner” in the coastal marine area. Currently the Minister is the final decision-maker for large projects or complex applications that are restricted coastal activities. Removal of this power will also prejudice any future iwi or hapu rights to protect the seabed and foreshore in coastal areas. The Bill removes this power and passes it to the regional council. To improve the current process applicants should be asked to seek consent from the Minister of Conservation prior to having that matter resolved through the RMA processes. Clause 20 should be deleted.

3. Limitation of appeals on policy statements and plans and the removal of cross-submissions. This severely undermines public participation and the development of robust policies and plans. Appealing is an important avenue for people to work through policy statements and plans. Even councils are known to appeal their own decisions or support other appeals as a means of fixing mistakes in their decisions. The proposed amendments are short-sighted as most plan and policy appeals are resolved through mediation without going to a full hearing, which is a cost effective outcome. Full appeals have assisted in resolving controversial issues, eg minimum river flows or subdivision controls. Amendment clauses 132 and 136 should be deleted.

4. Elimination of Council duties to summarise and respond to submissions and to call for further submissions on resource plans and policies. The publicly stated rationale for this is to save time and to have Plans and Policies finalised quickly, but the further or “cross-submission” process allows the community, individuals, businesses and others to indicate to the Council whether they support or oppose a proposal and points made in submission by others. This also enables councils to identify parties with which these issues should be further discussed. This process and the summarising of submissions is an essential process for good plan and policy development. Amendment clause 148 should be deleted.

5. The removal of the right of all interest groups and other parties to join appeals where they were not submitters in the first instance. The current provisions (s 274(1) and (2)) allow groups or businesses “representing a relevant aspect of the public interest” to join a case despite not being original submitters. This change is likely to mean those with a financial interest can join but environmental and community groups cannot. The provision has been used to allow community groups and business associations to join cases to add to the robustness of the process. Amendment clause 131 should be deleted.

6. Removing the non-complying category of resource consents. This will lead to greater uncertainty for the environment as more activities get put in the lower “default” discretionary category. The non-complying category of resource consent fits between discretionary and prohibited in a hierarchy from permitted to prohibited. The purpose of the sequence of types was to provide potential applicants for consents with a set of signals that would indicate the likely acceptability of their proposals, and so save investment in projects that would be unlikely to get approval. The proposed removal of the non-complying category will reduce this signalling and will likely lead to less ability for councils to reject proposals and reduce the environmental constraints on an activity as councils rarely put activities in the prohibited category. Sorting out this change and amending plans will also add to the workload of council and the community. Amendment clauses 147 and 152 and the first schedule of the Bill should be deleted.

7. Delaying the legal effect of proposed plan changes until a final decision is made thus placing the environment at risk. This change could make changes to vegetation control or coastal control rules in plans irrelevant as developers move quickly to get consents under the old rules and thus defeat the purpose of the change. It will induce other such pre-emptive behaviour. Amendment clauses 59 should be deleted.

8. Removal of the presumption that resource consents must be notified will mean even fewer consents are notified. The Bill proposes to remove the presumption in favour of notification (section 93) – already less than 5 percent of consent are notified. The Courts have used the presumption in favour of notifying to support notification of consents when councils have not notified significant decisions. The proposed changes in clause 68 give local authorities powers to write non-notification into Plans, and in the case of proposed section 94AAC actually prohibit notification when effects are considered to be minor. This means the community will have no chance to participate in assessments of whether effects are minor or not, and
councils can be prosecuted for notifying consents if it is found that the effects are in fact minor when a council judged them other-wise. Amendment clause 68 should be deleted.

9. The requirement that only effects beyond the immediate environment have to be considered when councils decide whether to notify resource consent applications. The test is for the notification requirements in proposed section 94AA (Clause 68 of the Bill) to not consider effects within the immediate environment of the activity. In paragraph a) notification is only compulsory if there are effects “beyond the immediate environment” of the activity. Not only is this vague, it also puts at risk any biodiversity or historic values of the site itself. Thus if a subdivision or mine, say, were only to destroy rare species in the immediate environment of the subdivision or mine, the council, by this test, would not be required to publicly notify the resource consent application. Similarly, loud noise in the “immediate environment” would not be a basis for notification. Clause 68 should be amended so that in proposed section 94AA(a) the words “beyond the immediate environment” are deleted.

10. Removal of any generic urban tree protection rules. This provision does not just affect single urban trees on private or public land but also affects rules to protect trees on private land in gullies, riparian areas, and coastal areas in the urban environment. The urban environment is not defined and could be widely interpreted. If this clause were retained, councils would be buried in individual applications to protect each tree. Amendment clauses 52 and 151 should be deleted.

11. Removing the requirement to review district plans every 10 years. The argument put forward for this is that developing plans has taken a long time. This is true, but a spurious argument, since future plan reviews have existing plans to build on and will not be nearly as laborious as developing the first rounds. With changing conditions and pressures, and the increasing number of private plan change applications, plans need regular reviews and it is important for Councils to review their plan every 10 years especially as second or third generation plan are developed. Amendment clauses 54 should be deleted.

12. Allowing the applicant to veto Councils seeking further information. An essential part of the RMA resource consent process is obtaining sufficient information to make good decisions. While there is a requirement for an environmental assessment to be prepared, there is no audit of that report which was previously required. The current provisions in the Act (section 92A(3)) allow councils to reject a proposal if “it has insufficient information to enable it to determine an application”. It is proposed that this provision be deleted.

This is another example of tilting decision making in favour of applicants and of increasing risk to the environment and community. Amendment clause 66 should be deleted.

13. Applicant is the ‘process maker’. If you have a project which you consider to be proposal of national significance (echoes of the repugnant National Development Act here), want a fast process and can pay, then you can ask the Environmental Protection Agency to recommend that the Minister take the project direct to a Board of Inquiry, skipping the council process and the Environment Court. For a smaller project you can ask the Council to agree to go direct to the Environment Court (new sections 87C and 87D) or you can get the Environment Court to over-rule the Council’s opposition (new section 87E). The Bill encourages cheque book planning; it is not in the interests of the community or the environment. Delete amendment clause 93.

14. Making National Environmental Standards (NES) the maximum standard rather than a national minimum. There are a range of changes which position the NESs as maximum standards rather than minimum standards that allow councils to set more stringent standards based on their individual circumstances. The Bill will make no improvement to the process by which these standards are made. It is weak compared to the development of National Policy Statements or rules under a plan in the First Schedule. Amendment clauses 39 and 40 (new section 44A) should be changed so that NESs are minimum standards.

Good things:

• Increase in the penalties to $300,000 for individuals and $600,000 for corporate bodies – but the increase still leaves fines at low levels when compared to the maximum penalties under the Commerce Act. Those are $5 million for bodies corporate and $500,000 for natural persons. (Support Clause 141 but call for stronger penalties).

• Providing power of the Environment Court to require a review of an offender’s resource consent by a council. (Support Clause 141).

• Allowing enforcement action to be taken against the Crown. This action is limited to only local councils and cannot be taken by other parties. That limitation should be removed (clause 5).

• Removing a Requiring Authority that is an applicant from the role of the final decision-maker. This is a major step forward and will stop road, transmission and other companies from being both the applicant and the decision-maker. (Support clauses 110-112).
**Resource Management Act**

**Other matters:**

- The Bill includes reference to the Environmental Protection Agency but it is really only a name and in the first instance will be the head of the Ministry for the Environment, a position subject to direction from the Minister. The EPA should have no political direction in making decisions on whether a project is of national significance and in then establishing a Board of Inquiry to hear the application. These provisions should have been left to the Phase II process to allow wider consideration of the role of the EPA. Clause 35 and associated provisions should be tabled by the Committee and not passed in the Bill.

- There are a number of changes in the Bill which diminish the role of the Environment Court as a specialist body. A standing Court, hearing and assessing environmental issues from scratch, heard by a judge and two expert commissioners, it will often be replaced by an ad hoc Board of Inquiry, which will generate a confusing two-track jurisprudence – one in the Environment Court and one in the Board of Inquiry process. It is unclear how conflicts will be resolved.

- The direct referral of matters to the Environment Court (clause 60 - new sections 87C to 87E) or to a Board of Inquiry (clauses 91 and 93 new sections 140 to 150AA), designed to save time, will create clogging in the Environment Court as the problem solving and resolving role of Council hearings will be lost. These provisions should be deleted.

**More detailed comments:**

**Time taken is overstated**

The Minister for the Environment, Nick Smith, has made a great claim about delays for large projects under the RMA, but is he right?

Among the projects the Minister has highlighted was the Wellington inner-city bypass. The Minister claimed the RMA process took 15 years but the information on the Transit NZ website tells a different story. A designation under the Resource Management Act was applied for in April 1996. The Resource Consent process, including appeals, was completed by May 1999. So the RMA process (including appeals to the Environment Court) took only three years.

The average time taken for roading projects reviewed in 2003 (Young-Cooper 2003, table 1), shows that all the projects took less than 3 years to pass through the RMA resource consent processes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Time Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALPURT B2 (Albany to Puhoi)</td>
<td>20 months (including appeal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland Grafton Gully</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project PJK Northern Arterial - Tauranga</td>
<td>11 months (including appeal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Inner City Bypass</td>
<td>15 months plus appeal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that the Minister has been badly advised on delays which are more urban myth than fact.

**Increase in RMA charges**

In addition to the changes to the RMA, the Government is proposing to increase drastically the charges for taking an appeal under the Act. The Minister has indicated that appeal lodgement charges will be increased to $500, which is an increase of nearly 1000 percent over the current costs for appeals on plan, policies or resource consents which now cost $55. The Minister can implement this increase with a change in regulations without changing the Act. Such court fee increases are another barrier to public participation and good policy and plan making.

**Draconian Trade Competitor rules**

The proposed rules to deal with Trade Competitors are lopsided and could result in community groups being prosecuted for innocent mistakes, for instance if they happen to have a member who is a trade competitor of the applicant for a resource consent.

The provisions (clause 139) allow action to be taken up to 10 years after the contravention, which is much wider than the 6 months allowed after an offence is known under section 338 of the Act.

This action can not only be taken against a competing business but any organisations or person supported by that competing business. Proceedings can be taken for damages which are much greater than the penalties that can be imposed under the Act for environmental polluters.

The provision requires any group before a case, to disclose whether they “have received, is receiving or may receive direct or indirect help from” a trade competitor. This provision is so broad that it may require groups to advise the Court of any donation or potential future donation from any possible trade competitor now or for ten years in the future. It is unworkable and absurd, because of the massive load it places on community groups.

Notice that the provision does not apply to the applicant who can use as many inducements and other resources as they like to get supporting submissions on their application. There are no provisions in the Bill to stamp out the outrageous and increasingly prevalent practice of councils paying applicants for resource consents.
Dairy Industry Offensive

By Cath Wallace

When TV watchers are smooched with advertisements promoting the dairy industry, you know that the dairy industry has decided to buy reputation, rather than earn it. The ads stress the significance of the dairy industry to New Zealand by trying to appeal to café culture, and by insisting that we ‘shouldn’t look back’ but rather forward. One is left to guess at the meaning of that, but presumably it means we should not hold dairy farmers accountable for past environmental damage, a view to which few outside that industry are likely to subscribe. The recent open day on dairy farms seems also to be part of a PR strategy on the part of the dairy industry to counter the negative publicity that the dairy industry’s greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity destruction, and water pollution have created.

The results of monitoring the Clean Streams Accord published on 12 March 2009 were met with a volley of mocking press releases from environmental quarters. The Greens called it the Dirty Dairying Accord. Forest and Bird and Fish and Game called it a failure. Fonterra’s spin was that it showed an incremental improvement. Their new targets that half of those who were not complying with their resource consents would in future, met with a furious response and calls for regulation rather than such a slack attitude.

The figures released show nationally nearly 1200 dairy farms were in serious non-compliance with their resource consents requirements for effluent discharge. Full compliance was noted on less than 50 percent of farms in Northland, Waikato and Canterbury.

The report states that: “The lowest levels of full compliance were recorded in Northland, Waikato, and Canterbury. The level of major non-compliance was highest in the Northland, Horizons, and Wellington regions with all three recording levels in excess of 20 percent. Only Marlborough recorded no significant non-compliance.”

The report notes that “there remain 1316 farms where cattle still have some access to waterways.”

The report states that “The current level of non-compliance is unacceptable and in light of this Fonterra has recently introduced new measures to assist poorly performing farmers. Regional councils will ensure their compliance and enforcement regimes are rigorous and effective in improving the current levels of full compliance.”

Fonterra only propose to fine those farmers who receive an Resource Management infringement notice for polluting rivers and streams $1500, and $3000 if prosecuted. These are small amounts compared to the size of the average dairy farm.

At the same time the Waikato Regional Council is proposing to scrap its $1 million fund for its ‘clean streams’ programme. This proposal is part of its proposed long term community plan.

National-led Government Dismantles Environmental Legacy

By Cath Wallace

The National-Act government seems intent on removing measures for the environment on a host of fronts. Funding for the Sustainable Business Network is to be removed, community input to the Resource Management Act is to be disadvantaged, the $1 billion fund for the insulation of houses has been abolished, and the Ministry for the Environment is to have a 30 percent budget cut. The Biofuels obligation and the renewables electricity target went in a legislative rush in December.

The Ministry for the Environment is to drop several programmes including the sustainable households programme, the Govt 3 initiative to make government agency activities less impacting on the environment, and the carbon neutral public service. The Bioethics Council is to be disbanded. Other programmes are to be cut back. In total the Ministry is to have a cut of over $26 million in its budget.

The Ministry is a small ticket item when it comes to Government expenditure so that if the Government was committed to the environment it could have found the money to fill these gaps.
Don’t trade the environment for short term jobs

By Barry Weeber

The Government should reject proposals from the Job Summit to trade environmental quality for illusory short term gains. Proposals to put a moratorium on improvements to water and air quality should be rejected because human and environmental health will be harmed.

There are a range of environmental initiatives that could create additional jobs including an expansion of the programme to retrofit existing houses to make them warmer, drier, healthier and with a smaller energy demand.

There are other activities that provide jobs and improve the environment, often at lower cost than capital intensive infrastructure projects such as road building.

One review estimates that “for every 1,000 houses retrofitted a total of 151 full-time equivalent jobs would be required for delivery solely of on-site retrofitting services; a total of 392 full-time equivalent jobs would be required to provide the products and services involved in the renovation activity.” (Beacon Pathway Consortium at www.beaconpathway.co.nz) There are currently about 860,000 houses in New Zealand which have no insulation, or are under insulated and 235,000 of these homes are occupied by people on low incomes (Minister of Energy, 2009).

The proposal to spend $60 million in promoting tourists will be undermined by any moves to downgrade environmental protection. What the Summit is saying is that we want tourists to come here but they shouldn’t drink the water or breathe the air. According to the Ministry for the Environment survey: “About two-thirds of New Zealanders live in areas that can experience air pollution. Each year, about 1100 people die prematurely from air pollution in urban areas. Most poor air quality in New Zealand is caused by high winter levels of particulate matter (known as PM10) from wood and coal used for home heating. Auckland, where about a third of New Zealand’s population lives, also experiences high levels of PM10 from road transport.”

Recent monitoring by local councils and the Ministry for the Environment showed that 58 per cent of New Zealand’s monitored airsheds failed the national standard for lung damaging particulates (toxic PM10).

The latest Ministry of Health monitoring of drinking water quality indicated that 20 percent of New Zealanders were at risk from supplied water. “Approximately 811,000 (20%) of New Zealanders are supplied with drinking-water that either failed to comply bacteriologically with the criteria of the drinking water standard New Zealand (DWSNZ) or for which there are no data because they were self-supplied.”

A review in 2006 for the Ministry of Health noted “There is ample evidence of waterborne disease outbreaks in New Zealand to indicate a significant risk of contracting gastro-intestinal disease (GID) from drinking-water that is untreated or inadequately treated,” and further remarked that “Based on currently available data, two separate estimates of the burden of endemic drinking-waterborne gastro-intestinal disease are ca. 18,000 and 34,000 cases per annum. Preliminary results from work in progress suggest that these are underestimates.”

According to a 2009 World Bank survey, New Zealand was the second easiest country in which to do business after Singapore.

Job Summit Proposals to reduce environmental quality:

Among the proposals that would undermine environmental protection and quality of the environment:

- Reduce regulatory compliance costs and impediments; Adopt a permissive approach to increase the range of permitted activities in building and housing, and food safety. Enable local government to determine appropriate level of consultation. Seek a moratorium on drinking water and air quality standards. Improve practice in council processing of regulatory consents.

- Big projects fast track: Establish a taskforce(s) to report directly to a relevant minister to anticipate and actively manage approval and regulatory processes for major and/or complex processes

- Rule-making freeze: Cabinet directive issued to government agencies/regulators to stop all rule and regulation making or extension, unless specifically approved by the minister. Reduce all enforcement activity to focus on minimum acceptable standards (rather than ‘nice to haves’) and the overall immediate interest for New Zealand.
The Government has again gone for more road building in its decision to scrap the regional fuel tax which was to be used by regional councils to fund public transport projects.

While much of the focus of the public discussion has been on Auckland rail electrification, with people paying nationally to fund Auckland’s transport, little attention has been given to the environmental implication of the changes.

In a confusing decision, the Government is taking over $420 million from non-roading transport expenditure, including $50 million from traffic safety management. This will reduce the public transport fund by about 42 percent over the next 3 years.

The Government has yet to indicate how projects previously to be funded by the regional petrol tax will be funded. As the Chair of the Auckland Regional Council Mike Lee stated: “We have real concerns about whether the New Zealand Transport Agency will be able to bridge the gap on projects that would have been funded by the regional fuel tax.”

The projects include essential Auckland public transport services:

- the Newmarket station ($35 million) – which is half built;
- an existing contract for diesel trains ($31 million) to help meet demand until new electric trains are in service;
- transport construction projects virtually ready to go - new stations at New Lynn ($13.6 million) and Manukau City ($14 million), and some ferry terminals on the North Shore and elsewhere ($37 million in total);
- integrated ticketing, for which an international tender is nearly completed.

Transport Minister Steven Joyce has not come clean on what public transport, cycling and pedestrian projects will now not be funded.

Auckland has shown how rapid increases in public transport use can be achieved by improving the service. There has been a threefold increase in annual rail patronage since 2004 from 2.5 million passenger trips to more than 7 million last year. Auckland is aiming to reach 11.5 million trips in the next two to three years which would exceed Wellington’s level of patronage.

“The comments by Mr Joyce that 84 percent of trips involve private transport ignores regional differences and the potential for public transport, cycling and walking to reduce demand for new roads. In Wellington, where there is a more extensive rail and public transport system, under 70 percent of trips involve private transport. If Auckland achieved similar rates to Wellington there would be a decrease in congestion, the for new roads and a lower environmental footprint and lower greenhouse gas emissions.”

Fishing industry campaigns for government help to access Pacific fisheries.

Papers obtained by ECO show that fishing companies are pressing the Minister of Fisheries to go soft on controls on bottom trawling in the high seas and in the South Pacific. The companies are disputing the Ministry of Fisheries’ attempts to gain New Zealand vessels’ compliance with the internationally agreed Interim Measures of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation; are disputing UNFAO rules about responsible fishing, and are trying to contest the nature of the interpretation by the Ministry of the 2006 UN General Assembly resolution in relation to controls on bottom trawling on the high seas.

Ambushing a new Fisheries Minister with bamboozling, butter-will-not-melt-in-the-mouth claims of responsibility, and ambushing the Minister and Ministry on legal interpretations are old tricks of the industry. Fisheries Ministers often take several years before they wise up, and typically that is too late.
Ocean Acidification – the hidden impact of climate change

By Cath Wallace

The effect of increased carbon dioxide levels in the air is to increase carbon dioxide in the world’s oceans which is making them more acidic.

At the Second Ocean Symposium in a High-CO2 World in Monaco in 6-9 October 2008, scientists issued a declaration designed to jolt policy makers into understanding that acidification of oceans is a real and profound problem as carbon dioxide (CO2) is absorbed from the atmosphere into the oceans, damaging ocean organisms and ecosystem function.

The current atmospheric CO2 level of 380 ppm is the highest concentration in several million years. Current projections are that ocean acidification later this century will reach levels not seen since the era of the dinosaurs over 65 million years ago.

The seas are now 25 to 30 percent more acidic than pre-industrial levels because the extra CO2 dissolves in water to form carbonic acid. Shell-forming creatures (including mussels, corals, hard planktons, and shrimps) which rely on carbonate ion to build shells, will be affected.

Scientists based in Australia have found that the shells of one species of foraminifera (Globigerina bulloides) from the Southern Ocean are 30 to 35 percent thinner than those shells formed prior to the industrial period. The paper is published in recent issues of Nature Geoscience on Mar. 8, Moy et al 2009. Foraminifera, which are type of plankton, are believed to be responsible for between 25 and 50 percent of the carbon absorbed by the oceans.

While foraminifera have shells of a calcite form of calcium carbonate, other species have aragonite which is more sensitive to acidification. These sensitive species include pteropods which are a critical species in Antarctic ecosystems.

Photo courtesy of Bob Zuur.

Monaco Declaration on Ocean Acidification:

We scientists who met in Monaco to review what is known about ocean acidification declare that we are deeply concerned by recent, rapid changes in ocean chemistry and their potential, within decades, to severely affect marine organisms, food webs, biodiversity, and fisheries.

"By mid-century, ocean acidification may render most regions chemically inhospitable to coral reefs."

To avoid severe and widespread damages, all of which are ultimately driven by increasing concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO2), we call for policymakers to act quickly to incorporate these concerns into plans to stabilize atmospheric CO2 at a safe level to avoid not only dangerous climate change but also dangerous ocean acidification.

Ocean acidification is accelerating and severe damages are imminent

Currently the average concentration of atmospheric CO2 is 385 parts per million (ppm), which is 38 percent more than the preindustrial level of 280 ppm. Half of that increase has occurred in the last 30 years. Current CO2 emissions are greater than projected for the worst-case scenario formulated a decade ago. And along with increasing emissions, the increase in atmospheric CO2 is accelerating. By mid-century, the average atmospheric CO2 concentration could easily reach double the preindustrial concentration.

At that 560-ppm level, it is expected that coral calcification rates would decline by about one-third. Yet even before that happens, formation of many coral reefs is expected to slow to the point that reef erosion will dominate. Reefs would no longer be sustainable. By the time that atmospheric CO2 reaches 450 ppm, it is projected that large areas of the polar oceans will have become corrosive to shells of key marine calcifiers.

Ocean acidification will have socioeconomic impacts

Ocean acidification could affect marine food webs and lead to substantial changes in commercial fish stocks, threatening protein supply and food security for millions of people as well as the multi-billion dollar fishing industry.

Coral reefs provide fish habitat, generate billions of dollars annually in tourism, protect shorelines from erosion and flooding, and provide the foundation for tremendous biodiversity, equivalent to that found in tropical rain forests.
Yet by mid-century, ocean acidification may render most regions chemically inhospitable to coral reefs. These and other acidification related changes could affect a wealth of marine goods and services, such as our ability to use the ocean to manage waste, to provide chemicals to make new medicines, and to benefit from its natural capacity to regulate climate. For instance, ocean acidification will reduce the ocean’s capacity to absorb anthropogenic CO2, which will exacerbate climate change.

**Ocean acidification is rapid, but recovery will be slow**

The current increase in ocean acidity is a hundred times faster than any previous natural change that has occurred over the last many millions of years. By the end of this century, if atmospheric CO2 is not stabilized, the level of ocean acidity could increase to three times the preindustrial level.

Recovery from this large, rapid, human-induced perturbation will require thousands of years for the Earth system to re-establish ocean chemical conditions that even partially resemble those found today; hundreds of thousands to millions of years will be required for coral reefs to return, based on the past record of natural coral-reef extinction events.

**Ocean acidification can be controlled only by limiting future atmospheric CO2 levels**

Climate-change negotiations focused on stabilizing greenhouse gases must consider not only the total radiation balance; they must also consider atmospheric CO2 as a pollutant, an acid gas whose release to the atmosphere must be curtailed in order to limit ocean acidification. Hence, limits (stabilization targets) for atmospheric CO2 defined based on ocean acidification may differ from those based on surface temperature increases and climate change.

Despite a seemingly bleak outlook, there remains hope. We have a choice, and there is still time to act if serious and sustained actions are initiated without further delay. We must start to act now because it will take years to change the energy infrastructure and to overcome the atmosphere’s accumulation of excess CO2, which takes time to invade the ocean.

“*The current increase in ocean acidity is a hundred times faster than any previous natural change that has occurred over the last many millions of years.*”

Therefore, we urge policymakers to launch four types of initiatives:

- to help improve understanding of impacts of ocean acidification by promoting research in this field, which is still in its infancy;
- to help build links between economists and scientists that are needed to evaluate the socioeconomic extent of impacts and costs for action versus inaction;
- to help improve communication between policymakers and scientists so that i) new policies are based on current findings and ii) scientific studies can be widened to include the most policy-relevant questions;
- to prevent severe damages from ocean acidification by developing ambitious, urgent plans to cut emissions drastically.

**More information**

The Monaco Declaration is approved by 155 scientists from 26 countries, leaders of research into ocean acidification and its impacts.

For the full list of signatories see [http://scrippsnews.ucsd.edu/Releases/doc/MonacoDeclaration.pdf](http://scrippsnews.ucsd.edu/Releases/doc/MonacoDeclaration.pdf)

This document is based on the report *Research Priorities for Ocean Acidification* (available at [http://ioc3.unesco.org/oanet/HighCO2World.html](http://ioc3.unesco.org/oanet/HighCO2World.html) along with the Declaration, endorsements, and photo credits).
Ocean Fertilisation Experiments
Risky and Counterproductive

By Cath Wallace

Absorption of CO2 from the atmosphere into the ocean by means of ‘ocean fertilisation’ with iron or urea has been promoted by a number of scientists and companies. New Zealand’s NIWA has been involved in several experiments in iron fertilisation and in July 2008 the US company CLIMOS made a pitch about their plans to do this in Wellington.

The international community has significant misgivings on this matter however, as the declaration on ocean acidification above would suggest. The Convention on Biodiversity has decided against such activity (COP 9 Decision IX/16, Bonn May 2008) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has invoked the London Convention and Protocol against such activity pending further investigation and development of international regulation. Their resolutions include the agreements in the box:

- Agree that until specific guidance is available, Contracting Parties should be urged to use utmost caution and the best available guidance to evaluate the scientific research proposals to ensure protection of the marine environment consistent with the Convention and Protocol;
- Agree that for the purposes of this resolution, legitimate scientific research should be defined as those proposals that have been assessed and found acceptable under the assessment framework;
- Agree that, given the present state of knowledge, ocean fertilization activities other than legitimate scientific research should not be allowed. To this end, such other activities should be considered as contrary to the aims of the Convention and Protocol and not currently qualify for any exemption from the definition of dumping in Article III.1(b) of the Convention and Article 1.4.2 of the Protocol;

[Resolution LC-LP.1(2008) on the regulation of ocean fertilization (Adopted on 31 October 2008)]

In New Zealand the lead agencies on the matter have been the Ministry of Transport and Maritime New Zealand, with the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology promoting New Zealand participation at international meetings to develop rules, including rules to protect scientific experimentation while possibly disallowing ocean fertilisation for commercial gain (from the issue of carbon credits).

A joint German–Indian ocean fertilisation with iron project in the South Atlantic was briefly halted when the German Ministry for the Environment declared that the expedition did not comply with international requirements for a prior careful Environmental Impact Assessment. After an absurdly hasty assessment done in a matter of days, the German Science Ministry gave permission anyway despite continued opposition from the German Ministry for the Environment. This is likely to be discussed at an upcoming meeting of Antarctic Treaty parties.

Meanwhile an Australian company, Ocean Nourishment Corporation, fronted by Sydney University Ocean Technology Group, Professor Ian Jones had plans to dump urea (a form of nitrogen) in the Tasman Sea in March 2009. ECO has not heard whether the project has continued, despite condemnation from around the world that it is damaging and illegal under the London Protocol (on dumping at sea).

This enterprise follows experiments by the company on a smaller scale and has been condemned by New Zealand’s NIWA biogeochemists, Phil Boyd and Cliff Law, as being neither effective nor prudent, and indeed that it may be counterproductive by stimulating nitrous oxide emissions while not causing any permanent reduction of CO2 since it is taken up by the ecosystem and does not drop to the seafloor. Nitrous oxide is a more potent greenhouse gas than CO2, though CO2 is more persistent in the atmosphere.

Both Boyd and Law have been involved with iron fertilisation experiments. Cliff Law approves of careful experimentation on ocean fertilisation, whereas many marine scientists consider it too risky. Law was due to represent New Zealand at a technical meeting to devise rules to control ocean fertilisation, but at the time of going to press, ECO had not heard any report back.
Dr Ian Prior: MD2

By Cath Wallace

Ian Prior, eminent epidemiologist, activist for the environment, peace, sculpture, Maori and Pacific health, and much more, died on 17 February 2009. When I joined the ECO Exec in 1978 Ian was chairperson, a position that he held from 1975 to 1982. He was one of the main founders of the Save the Manapouri campaign, the first environmental mass movement campaign that shook the Muldoonist Think Big, energy and capital intensive, environmentally destructive ‘development’ strategy to its roots by challenging the damming of the Manapouri River by the Ministry of Works and Development for hydro power generation.

Ian had an amazing knack for encouraging people, and for getting people to work together. His utterly egalitarian approach was profoundly blind to social status, though he made good use of those with wealth and connection. It allowed him to reach into many worlds within society. This was exemplified at his funeral in Old St Pauls in Wellington which was packed with activists, the ‘great and the good’ of Wellington, family, former colleagues and which climaxed in a haka from Black Power and the presence of the Mongrel Mob. His epidemiological work with communities of the Pacific, particularly Tokelau, and Maori, particularly Tuhoe in Ruatahuna and Tikitiki left him with life long bonds with those communities.

Ian’s work for the environment was mentioned only a little at his funeral, but it was major. He chaired ECO at a time of campaigning against logging of native forests, damming of our wild and scenic rivers and during the energy and anti nuclear campaigns. ECO pressed with other groups successfully for the creation of national parks. Ian was one of the founders of ECO and he lent knowledge and expertise to the campaign against nuclear power. He was a leading light too of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and founder of its New Zealand branch, and gave the Peace movement support in many ways. For him, peace, environment, health and social justice were all connected.

Born in Masterton in 1923, Ian had a distinguished medical career, and was a founder of public health and epidemiology in New Zealand. He was also very generous and energetic, but used sometimes to call himself ‘MD squared’ – a pun on his medical condition and his medical qualifications. He suffered deep bouts of depression with a manic depressive disorder, but his upside was organised, energetic, directed, urgent and engaging – hence his extraordinary feats of activism and campaigning on many issues. He was a great supporter of the arts, with wife Elespie, who also contributed to all his campaigns including to ECO events, and to his own wellbeing. She had money from the Hallensteins retailers, and established the Willi Fels trust which from time to time gave grants to ECO and to a multitude of other causes. Ian’s brother Owen was also a generous help.

I recall being vastly amused at an occasion when he had pulled together an event in the nature of a poetry and campaign event with wine and cheese and ‘Pureora non-alcoholic punch’ for one of ECO’s anti logging campaigns. Ian had persuaded Denis Glover to give a poetry reading but Glover refused loudly to do so “until his inferiors left” (meaning the Minister of the Muldoon government whose policies were so offensive). The Minister finally departed and Glover demanded his ‘glasses’. Thinking this must surely be a glass of wine that was required, Elespie obliged. In frustration, and actually needing his spectacles, Glover threatened “to have an erection” if his glasses were not brought. Ian maintained the pace and spirit of the gathering unfazed by all this.

Ian was also a major patron of the arts, a co-founder of the Wellington Sculpture Trust, and he also met Henry Moore and secured sponsorship for the Henry Moore statue that now stands in Wellington in the Botanic Gardens below the Met office.

Ian was offended by the wasteful destruction of both native forests and of buildings of character in Wellington. After much campaigning by ECO about native forests and for reform of the environmental administration in New Zealand, Ian secured kauri from one of the buildings on the Terrace in Wellington being demolished for the new head quarters of the Fletcher Challenge group. He organised the crafting from the rescued timber of a kauri table that was then presented to the Fletcher Challenge group. He also organised the crafting from the rescued timber of a kauri table that was then presented by ECO to the Commission for the Environment. That round table, a monument to reuse of resources, to native forests preservation and to ECO-Environment Commissioner relations, is now in the offices of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.

Ian was well aware of the continuing environmental problems, even after he left the helm of ECO. In 2005 he was one of many distinguished and other people to sponsor an appeal to voters to prioritise climate change policies in their voting in the election.
Saving Happy Valley, still

By Quentin Duthie

When I walked into Happy Valley with my brother, niece and nearly 50 others in November 2005, I didn't think that the occupation would still be there over three years later.

But it is. And the lovingly crafted camp furniture, the well-stocked kitchen complete with snow roof, and the enormously comfortable yurt are testimony to the commitment and creativity activists have put into saving the valley.

While the Waimangaroa Valley is still beautiful and intact, recent residents at the Happy Valley camp have witnessed a flurry of helicopter flights, small scale clearance and even a pump apparently taking water from the wetland – and the occupation’s water supply. Solid Energy, it seems, are increasing their activities in the area – starting with drilling for more coal samples. Mining could start within a year and the Save Happy Valley Coalition has been keeping a close eye on developments, and has vowed to actively oppose this destruction in the valuable and bio-diverse Happy Valley wetland.

The fantastic swimming holes in the Waimangaroa Valley have been discoloured and foamy at times in the last few months, but complaints to the West Coast Regional Council have resulted in an abatement notice and subsequent improvement in Waimangaroa River water quality.

In the wider context of the global economic recession, Solid Energy has cut production at Stockton. Funny how economic constraints reducing production are readily accepted, but environmental constraints cannot be allowed to slow the mining juggernaut. Despite the 50 percent reduction in prices for coking coal recently, Solid Energy sees a strong long-term future for coal, buoyed no doubt by the National Government’s support for dirty energy sources.

Meanwhile on the other side of the Stockton Plateau, a small West Coast company has applied for resource consents that would take the polluted mining water out of the Ngakawau River. Hydro Developments Limited plans to collect water on the plateau, pipe it down the hill and create electricity, then send it out to sea. Forest and Bird, the Green Party and Federated Mountain Clubs have supported the scheme in principle, although concerns about discharge to the marine environment in particular still need to be addressed. Solid Energy is now proposing an alternative scheme which is unlikely to garner environmentalists’ support because it involves inundation of part of the Ngakawau Ecological Area.

“Mining could start within a year and the Save Happy Valley Coalition has been keeping a close eye on developments”

Save Happy Valley members celebrate the successful third year of occupation in Happy Valley. Photo by Quentin Duthie.

Disclaimer: While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this publication, ECO, its executive and editorial staff accept no liability for any errors or omissions. Views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the policy options and views of ECO, its executive or its member organisations.
As both an avid conservation advocate and an active tramper, I love to explore the places that environmental advocacy groups seek to protect. It helps to keep the issues grounded in the real natural world that we all treasure so dearly. It’s a spirit of active engagement that is common amongst the executive of the Federated Mountain Clubs, an ECO member organisation.

This summer I re-visited Happy Valley, and also the Mokihinui catchment, where Meridian proposes a hydrodam. The palatable history of the old Lyell pack-track, the landscape diversity in the South Branch of the Mokihinui, and the power and colour of the Mokihinui gorge stand out as the deepest impressions I gained from the walk – absorbed experience that only comes from visiting a place. A Trust proposes a walk/bike track from Lyell to Mokihinui, and we’re keeping an eye on developments there. Having rafted the river, and now walked it from source to sea, I have a much deeper appreciation of it. From above and below, the gorge is beautiful and precious – no question.

FMC and other groups have been working to address the growing threat to Aotearoa’s wild rivers, and the Mokihinui is the flagship campaign at present. At present the hearing’s commissioners have called for more evidence, which will be heard in April. A nearby proposal for a hydro scheme on the Stockton plateau prompted submissions in support from FMC, Forest and Bird, and the Green Party MP Kevin Hague, as it would result in a cleaner Ngakawau River, and is an example of hydro that doesn’t destroy wild and biodiverse places. The contrast to Mokihinui couldn’t be starker. FMC is working with other NGOs in the Living Rivers Coalition, and is looking forward to a 2-day Wild Rivers workshop in Murchison in April. ECO has also been invited.

As well as involvement in campaigns around wild rivers, FMC continues to engage with the Department of Conservation to ensure our public lands are managed in a way that both protects their natural and historic values, and keeps them accessible but not over-developed for the public to enjoy. Issues of visitor safety, changes to concessions policy and the management of Great Walks are all on the table at the moment. Many Conservation Management Strategies (10 year plans) are currently being reviewed, and FMC is concerned that the new ones are too broad-brush, leaving little public input into DOC’s management decisions.

FMC also paid close attention to the kerfuffle about DOC receiving ‘hush-money’ from Meridian to ‘silence’ its objections to the Project Hayes wind-farm in Otago. While the media was distracted by a sniff of corruption, FMC was more concerned about the secrecy of such deals, and the incompatibility of DOC engaging as a conservation advocate in RMA processes, when the Government likes to present ‘Whole-of-Government’ submissions. In one hearing (North Bank hydro), DOC’s evidence had to be sought by Fish and Game under the OIA because DOC had been prevented from submitting it! DOC must be allowed to be the champion of natural and historic values that the Conservation Act mandates it to be.

The above report has been a bit biased towards issues I have personally been involved with. In addition, the Mt Aspiring Station has recently completed Tenure Review, options for the St James area post-review are being negotiated, the hearings for the Hurunui Water Conservation Order continue, and the Walking Access Commission is getting up and running.

“FMC have been working to address the growing threat to Aotearoa’s wild rivers, and the Mokihinui is the flagship campaign at present”

Tramper on mudstone in the South Branch Mokihinui. Photo by Quentin Duthie.

More information

FMC puts out an email newsletter each month – to receive it contact our administrator Gail on fmcadmin@xtra.co.nz. FMC is also about to launch a much-improved website at www.fmc.org.nz.

Our AGM – to which all FMC club members are invited, and guests are also welcome – will be held at the Brentwood Hotel in Kilbirnie, Wellington on Saturday 6 June.
In this section, we bring you access to information on ecological and environmental issues from a variety of sources. We hope that this information will be useful, and if you would like to contribute a book, website, article, film or anything else, please let us know. Email us at eco@eco.org.nz, with ‘Information Review’ in the subject line with all of your suggestions!

Book Reviews

By Meghan Hughes

A Hot Planet Needs Cool Kids: Understanding Climate Change and What You Can Do About It
Author: Julie Hall; illustrated by: Sarah Lane

Published in 2007, A Hot Planet Needs Cool Kids is suitable both at home and in the classroom. In this book kids, parents, and teachers will find the very latest information about the causes and effects of climate change, how people are working to reduce it, and ways kids and their families and schools can join the fight. It teaches and inspires through clear and accessible writing, engaging illustrations, hands-on activities, cool and hot facts, eco-hero features, and a hopeful and empowering message to get kids involved in confronting global warming and developing their best selves through such work. It might even teach the parent a thing or two...

The Last Tree on the Island
Author Bob Darroch

Mr Smitt and Mrs Smitt live on a small island with a cat, a dog, some birds and a magnificent tree. But one day Mr Smitt cuts the tree down because he thinks it is too big and too shady. But he soon finds out the impact of losing the tree: Where will the birds shelter? What will they use for fertiliser on the garden now that the leaves have gone? How will they get rid of bad air? When Mr Smitt tries to make amends, things become worse.

Mangrove
Authors: Glenda Kane and Lisa Allen

This children’s picture book describes the life-cycle of a mangrove with rhyming text and beautiful illustrations. Mangroves, found in swampy areas, are shrubs that play an important part in our fragile ecosystems. This is a very well thought-out concept and comfortably crosses over between fiction and non-fiction.

Earth Matters: an encyclopaedia of ecology
Author: Kim Bryan

From the deepest oceans to fiery deserts, tropical jungles to icy mountains, Earth Matters lets you explore and get close to the places or ‘biomes’ that make our world so special. Readers will find out how life on Earth began, and see the effect humankind has had on the natural world. Amazing photographs taken from space show how the Earth is changing, and what each of us can do to help preserve its fragile wonder.

Living Green: The New Zealand Handbook for an Eco-friendly, Toxin-free, Sustainable Life
Authors: Annmaree Kane and Christina Neubert

Living Green is a 'bible' for every New Zealand family; an assiduously researched manual that operates on two levels. Part One gives ten simple steps to greening your life. Part Two has 21 chapters that provide the factual back-up behind each of the ten steps. Topics include: Babies and Children; Personal Care Products; Healthy Eating; Primary Foods; Processed Foods; Water and Other Drinks; Shopping Wisely; Heath Care at Home; Pets; Cleaning your Home; Clothing, Fabric and Furnishings; Building and Renovation; Indoor Air Quality; Air Pollution; Electromagnetic Fields; Re-using and Recycling; GM; Hormone Disrupters; Sustainability; Sustainable business; Climate Change.

That’s Not Junk!
Author: Nikki Slade Robinson

A New Zealand book published last year, told in rhyme, this story grew out of the author’s fond childhood memories of visits to the dump (or the rubbish tip), a place always regarded as a fantastic treasure hunt and source of magical ‘stuff’ to re-use. The story treats conservation and recycling in a fun way and will hopefully inspire children and fire up their imaginations.
I would like to support ECO by:
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- subscribing as a sustaining ‘Friend of ECO’
  –$112.50 p.a. (GST inclusive).
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Join ECO:
Please send information on becoming a member of ECO
Membership is by application for groups involved in the
protection of the environment. Subscriptions for member
organisations are determined by the size of the organisation:
* 1-100 members: $80 p.a.
* 101- 1000 members: $125 p.a.
* 1000 + members: $430 p.a. (all GST inclusive)
* STUDENT GROUPS $30 p.a.

ECO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009

Greening our way out of a recession

Friday 10 - Sunday 12 July 2009
Karanga Camp, 79 Te Henga Road, Waitakere City, Auckland

Programme and registration information will be available
soon. Check our website at www.eco.org.nz for more details
as they develop.

ECO member groups are welcome to take part in the
conference. If your group would like to give a presentation
or be involved in some way, please contact us at
eco@eco.org.nz with ‘ECO Conference’ in the subject line.

The 2009 Annual General Meeting of ECO will take place
during the conference on Saturday 11 July. Agenda items for
the AGM should be submitted by 31 May 2009.

ECO Facebook group

ECO now has a group page on the popular social networking
website Facebook.

To join us, log onto www.facebook.com and search groups
using the key words ‘environment and conservation
organisations’.

You can check out the latest photos, post comments on our
’wall’, or talk to other group members on the discussion
board. Check it out and invite your friends to join too!
## ECO MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action for the Environment</th>
<th>Kakariki, Canterbury University Environmental Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Technology for Living Association</td>
<td>Lincoln Environment Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auckland Civic Trust</td>
<td>Marlborough Environment Centre</td>
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<td>Bay of Islands Coastal Watchdog</td>
<td>Massey Environmental Group</td>
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<td>Baywatch Hawkes Bay Environment Group</td>
<td>Monarch Butterfly New Zealand Trust</td>
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<td>Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association</td>
<td>National Council of Women of NZ</td>
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<td>Buller Conservation Group</td>
<td>Nelson Environment Centre</td>
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<td>Clean Stream Waheihe</td>
<td>New Zealand Institute of Forestry</td>
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<td>Clean Water Whangamata</td>
<td>New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects</td>
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<td>Coromandel Watchdog of Hauraki</td>
<td>New Zealand Trust for Conservation Volunteers</td>
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<td>Cycling Advocates Network</td>
<td>Orari River Protection Group</td>
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<td>Dunedin Environment Centre</td>
<td>Organics Aotearoa New Zealand</td>
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<td>East Coast Bays Coastal Protection Society</td>
<td>Pacific Institute of Resource Management</td>
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<td>East Harbour Environmental Association</td>
<td>Save Mahinerangi Society</td>
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<td>Eastern Bay of Islands Preservation Society</td>
<td>Save the Otago Peninsula</td>
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<td>Eco Fest Educational Charitable Trust</td>
<td>Soil &amp; Health Association of NZ</td>
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<td>Engineers for Social Responsibility</td>
<td>South Coast Environment Society</td>
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<td>Environmental Futures</td>
<td>Students for Environmental Action</td>
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<td>Environmental Law Centre</td>
<td>Surfbreak Protection Society</td>
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<td>Far North Environment Centre</td>
<td>Sustainable Otautahi Christchurch</td>
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<td>Federated Mountain Clubs of NZ</td>
<td>Sustainable Whanganui Trust</td>
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<td>Foundation for Environmental Education New Zealand</td>
<td>Sustaining Hawke’s Bay Environment Centre</td>
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<td>Friends of Golden Bay</td>
<td>Tasman Environmental Education Trust</td>
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<td>Friends of Nelson Haven and Tasman Bay</td>
<td>Te Aroha Earthwatch</td>
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<td>Friends of the Earth - NZ</td>
<td>Thames Coast Preservation and Protection Society</td>
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<td>Friends of the Shoreline</td>
<td>Toxins Action Group</td>
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<td>Gecko, Victoria University Environment Group</td>
<td>Wakatipu Environmental Society</td>
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<td>GE-Free New Zealand in Food and Environment</td>
<td>Wellington Botanical Society</td>
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<td>Greenpeace NZ</td>
<td>Wellington Tramping and Mountaineering Club</td>
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<td>Guardians of Pauatahanui Inlet</td>
<td>Wildlife Society, NZVA</td>
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<td>Initial Volco Trust</td>
<td>Yellow Eyed Penguin Trust</td>
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16