Budget 2000: Welcome Relief

THE BUDGET 2000 is a welcome relief for the environment and conservation. The Labour-Alliance government have shown considerable commitment to addressing urgent environmental issues.

Increased funding for biodiversity, support for EECA, a focus on public transport and development of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will make a critical difference. The $15 million Green Party package is also good news, though rumours that it may not eventuate are a cause of grave concern. The Green funding of legal aid, environment centres, border checks and conservation awareness is desperately needed.

Despite the green glow around the budget, some of the decision making on environmental initiatives was clearly ad-hoc. The separate Green Party package was put together after the Labour-Alliance government apparently forgot to consider the Green’s priorities during the preparation of the main Budget. Many of the initiatives seem to be based on one-off payments, rather than being ongoing programmes.

The budget was not used to signal any major new policies to address environmentally damaging activities. Hopes for the early introduction of charges or other economic instruments targeting polluters were dashed. Clearly absent from the budget announcements was any sense of the government having a systematic, coherent approach to reduction of pollution and land degradation.

To progress development of an Oceans Policy the Ministry of Fisheries has secured a substantial increase in policy capacity. In the absence of matching funding for the environmental agencies there is a strong likelihood the Policy will be dominated by pro-exploitation voices.

Work on a social and environmental audit programme, secured as part of the Green Party package, could well help shift government thinking so that it takes a more systematic approach. Time will tell.

Budget 2000 details

The following analysis outlines the 2000/2001 Budget and assesses its environmental and conservation implications. The Green Party package is included in a separate box. Figures are GST inclusive.

Estimates for government appropriations and other fiscal documents are available online at the Treasury site (www.treasury.govt.nz). Copies of press releases can be found at the Executive’s website (www.executive.govt.nz).

Agriculture and Forestry

The MAF vote this year includes $1.6 million for “sustainable resource development”. It is unclear what this vote is for apart from the budget note which indicates a particular emphasis for “forestry, greenhouse gases, property rights in sinks and credits and in meeting, monitoring and reporting obligations”.

MAF could end up being the major promoter of sinks as the “answer” to global warming rather than reducing emissions. It is unclear what role the Ministry for the Environment will take in this work. There is also an increase in policy advice of $1.6 million.

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There is no budget this year for payments for South Island Landless Native Act (SLNLA) lands which are being lodged in Otago and Southland. Last year there were payments of $2.72 million which includes “goodwill” payments of $0.75 million which did not result in the protection of any hectare of this land.

**Biodiversity**

The Budget Package to implement the NZ Biodiversity Strategy (inclusive of GST) relates to funding for Conservation, Environment, Fisheries and Biosecurity. The figures referred to in this section are also counted in the Budgets for each of the departmental Votes so are not extra to the figures discussed in the other sections below.

A total of $187 m is budgeted for the implementation of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy over five years. There is a total of $66 m in the first three years, starting in 2000/01 at $18 m and increasing by another $10 m each year to $2003/4 and then rising to $35 m in 2004/5.

Marine biodiversity and biosecurity is to receive, over five years, $14.1 m for gaining more information, $2.5 m for the Oceans Strategy, $11.4 m for marine reserves, and $400,000 for marine environmental education. Environment is to get $2.5 m to support achievement of marine biodiversity at a regional level. A welcome first is $9.8 m to be spent on marine biosecurity.

The government undertakes to provide just $2.7 million over five years for assessment of risks to terrestrial biosecurity and the development of a Biosecurity Strategy for New Zealand.

Conservation of land and freshwater is to get $50.1 m over five years – a large chunk of this is for increasing protected areas on private land. A further $93.4 m is to be spent on improving the condition of land and freshwater conservation. Of this, $10 m over five years is for kiwi sanctuaries, $22.8 m for weed control, $34.4 m for animal control, $3.2 m for offshore island eradication, $16.6 m for mainland island species recovery, and $6.5 m for improving the condition of biodiversity on private land.

**Biosecurity issues**

The only winners in the Biosecurity Budget was the Ministry of Fisheries which had an extra $1.7 million to work on marine biosecurity issues. This was a 350% increase in this area. The Department of Conservation had a small increase in its vote biosecurity ($0.27 m).

While the overall Biosecurity vote indicates an increase in $7 million most of this is due to a transfer of $3.3 million which was previously allocated to the MAF vote. Around 94.5% of this vote is purchased from MAF.

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**Greens Budget Package**

The Greens have secured an additional $15 million for a range of initiatives where urgent action is required. Launching the package Ms Fitzsimmons and Mr Donald described the package as “modest” in monetary terms but said the initiatives could make a real difference.

- $2.5 million for a public awareness programme to build awareness of the environment and an understanding of the consequences of human actions. Will be included in Vote Conservation to be devised following Green Party and government consultation with DoC, other relevant agencies and Forest & Bird. Funding expected to assist work by DoC, as well supporting schools and community environmental education through internet resources and outreach programmes.
- $1 million environmental legal aid to be administered by the Ministry for the Environment. Help with costs involved in bringing cases to court.
- $730,000 for development of a social and environmental audit programme in partnership with business and community groups, support for development of a set of alternative accounts to be prepared by Statistics NZ.

- Domestic organic certification scheme, by a joint action group consisting of officials, organic industry and conventional farming representatives, and a Maori representative.
- $300,000 for funding of environment centres, grants of up to $50,000 per centre available to assist groups with day to day running costs such as administration and rent.
- $250,000 for an initiative to help integrate environmental education into school curriculum, training and coordination of efforts to implement the environmental education strategy will be a focus.
- $235,000 for a pesticide reduction programme. Work on developing a strategy to complement a Pesticide Reduction Bill to be administered by the Ministry for the Environment.
- Other new initiatives include $159,000 establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary Healthcare, and $4 million for a quit smoking programme.
Conservation

Overall, the budget administered by DoC is only about $2 million greater than the 1999/2000 budget. It amounts to $209 million, of which $201 is appropriations from the Crown, the rest is revenue and receipts to the Crown. Some of the 1999/2000 funding was from the National Party’s Green package, itself not part of DoC’s baseline and ending in mid 2000. Some of the money is for DoC to pass on for non-departmental purposes such as the funds for protection of biodiversity on private and Maori land, historic places and subscriptions to international organisations such as CITES and IUCN.

As noted in our Six Month Performance Assessment of the Government, (elsewhere in this ECOLink), if we exclude from consideration the provision in the budget for non-departmental funding, the 2000/01 budget provides $185.8 million for DoC. This compares with $172.4 million provided in 1999/2000 (of which only $163.6 million was actually spent). This represents an increase in budgeted funding of 7.7%, but not all of this is an increase in baseline funding.

It is unfortunate that DoC underspent its total budget of $207.3 million in 1999/2000 by $12.8 million. This suggests an inability to monitor spending well, though we gather that it partly reflects uncertainties about revenues. $5.3 million of the shortfall in spending was of management services on the conservation estate while $1.4 million was unspent on protection of species and island habitats. Both areas are critically under-funded, so it is sad to see money unspent.

Underspending on DoC’s output class “identification and implementation of protection for natural and historic places was the other big area underspent – only $13.7 million was spent instead of the $18.4m allocated, a $4.7m shortfall. This presumably reflects the restructuring of the Historic Places Trust in 1999. A related major reduction for 2000/01 is the allocation for the protection of natural and historic places: the estimates are down from $18.4m in 1999/2000 to $11.1m for 2000/01.

Environment

Increases in funding to the Ministry for the Environment go part way to ensuring the Ministry is able to operate effectively. In the Vote for the Environment charter ECO called for the Ministry’s budget to be doubled. Depending on the what figures you use, MfE’s funds have increased by 20% to 24%.

The 2000 budget increases MfE’s allocation to $23.5 million, though this includes the final instalment of the National government’s ‘Green Package’, worth $3.78 million. Funding available for the development and implementation of sustainable management has been increased by $700,000 to $4.8 million.

Additional funding received in the 2000 budget round is to be used to further the Waste Management and Climate Change programmes, as well some on biodiversity. The $1.5 million allocated for the climate change programme will support a science programme, monitoring, reporting and review programmes, public education and policy advice on measures to address greenhouse gas emissions and enhance carbon sinks.

Budget papers were used by the Ministry to signal its focus in three years and beyond. In addition to programmes mentioned above, the will be water resource management, biodiversity and legislative frameworks.

Fisheries

The Ministry of Fisheries budget increased by $7.5 million. The major increases where in policy framework ($2.6 million), fisheries research ($1.2 million), and regulatory management ($2.8 million).

The Ministry vote also included $0.45m for restructuring costs. The Ministry’s structure is currently under review. ECO hopes that any changes makes the Ministry better able to respond to its environmental commitments.

One of the key uncertainties in the fisheries budget is not included in the MAF vote that is the upgrading of the fisheries computer system. This system is being currently run by a fishing industry owned computer system. The fishing industry has already got $10 million from 2 years ago which is being used to scope the changes but the total cost could be over $20 million.

While ECO opposes the fishing industry managing these key computer databases the timetable for completing this work is already slipping. The Ministry of Fisheries reporting that administrative changes to quota areas and quota species will not be able to occur till 1 October 2002. This is a year’s slippage in the last year.

Justice

There is no apparent provision in the Justice Vote for legal aid for the environment – but the Green Party package does provide for $1m to be provided for environmental legal aid. It is not clear how this is to be administered – though apparently it is to be via application to the Ministry for the Environment. This could be awkward when the application is to review Ministerial decisions under the Fisheries Act or other such.

Vote Lands

Vote lands includes the important work of the Ministry of Lands in assessing high country lands and negotiating with leaseholders to privatise some land and transfer others to DoC. Deplorably the vote for land tenure reform allocations has not been funded this year which previously received $3.248 million.

This is an important area of funding. There are some leases which due to their ecological and recreational values they should be bought outright and transferred to the Department of Conservation. Unless this funding is allocated New Zealand could lose access to a range of important areas of the high country.

Ombudsman

The Ombudsman’s office has been given a tiny $120,000 increase in funding – probably well below what is needed.

Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

The PCE still has a very small budget at $1.869 mil including GST. This is increased by $242,000 (incl GST) for 2000/01 and beyond as part of the baseline.
Research, Science and Technology

One of the biggest changes least remarked in the Budget is the conversion of the Public Good Science Fund to largely private use under the rubrics of “Research for Industry” and “New Economy Research Fund”. Pete Hodgson, the Minister of Science and CRI's is also the associate Minister of Regional Development.

Much of the Public Good Science Fund has been converted into a business research and development fund, a substitute for a promised tax credit for research and development. The system set up is likely to be cumbersome for business. It is regrettable that the government has converted a fund for public good science into what is primarily an industry fund. It is also true that much of this conversion happened de facto under the previous government so that the new labels simply complete this regrettable transfer.

There is a total of $474m in the Research, Science and Technology Vote, of which $348 m is to be for competitiveness and innovation. A further $84 mil, or 17.7%, of the fund is for outputs to increase knowledge of the New Zealand environment. Notes to the Budget say that funding in this vote has increased by $43.6 mil for 2000/2001 over the previous year, so it particularly disappointing that there is only a 0.37 m increase in environment research. From an environment and conservation point of view, the demise of the PGSF, the privatisation of this fund and the minimal increase in environment research funding is one of the biggest disappointments of the budget.

The Security Intelligence Service

For reasons that escape us and certainly are not explained, the SIS has been granted a further half a million dollars, bringing its total up to $11.5 m. Perhaps this reflects its new widened mandate to spy on many more locals?

Transport

Public transport receives a boost in the budget, a welcome relief for congested cities. Demand for investment in public transport and other environmentally benign transport options, is burgeoning and likely to outstrip the amount available. The amount available to public transport services and alternatives to roading projects is $52.8 million, up from $43.38 million the previous year. The extra funding will be used for increased passenger transport services and design of Auckland’s $130 million North Shore busway. This is not the only significant change, as the annual expenditure “cap” of $46.2 million on public transport will be lifted.

Funding for new roading projects has decreased slightly, down 1.97% to $348.7 million. The small decrease is a small deviation in what has been a steadily growing fund. For instance, last year funding available for new roads increased $50 million.

No other significant policy announcements were made. Although the government has backed away from the roading privatisation agenda of National, neither a clear policy direction nor a timetable has been signalled.

Nth Island Hector’s Dolphin management decisions: Procrastination continues

Agreement at a two day workshop that North Island Hector’s dolphin are genetically distinct, threatened with extinction, in decline, have a population estimated at 100 or less and are impacted by gill nets has still not led to any action to stop gill netting.

Officials from DoC and the Ministry of Fisheries are considering what action to take and whether to take it under the Fisheries Act 1996 or the Marine Mammals Protection Act or both.

We await decisive action and if it is not forthcoming we will take the issue to the international community. If you want to help, please write on this matter to: Hon Sandra Lee, Minister of Conservation and to Hon Pete Hodgson, Minister of Fisheries, both at Parliament, Wellington (no stamp required) You can also email them at Sandra.Lee@parliament.govt.nz or Pete.Hodgson@parliament.govt.nz

Research Grants

In April, new ECO member WADAP – the Whale & Dolphin Adoption Project – allocated two new grants for marine mammal research.

The recipients were:
• Mana Stratton of Massey University, studying the growth, development and reproductive characteristics of pygmy sperm whales.
• Deanna Clement of Otago University, studying the distribution and abundance pattern of Hector’s dolphins in relation to oceanographic conditions around the South Island, New Zealand.

As a result of excellent public support in their first year of operation the Adoption Project has been able to give funding to nine different marine mammal projects in New Zealand.

Funds are raised by offering the public an opportunity to adopt a whale or dolphin from a selection illustrated on the project’s flyer.

Annual sponsorship ranges from a family package at $40. A school or group adoption pack at $75 to a corporate package at $500. A standard package includes:
• a personalised Whale & Dolphin Adoption Project certificate
• a biography and sighting map of your marine mammal
• a photograph of the selected marine mammal
• a years subscription to Spirits of the Sea newsletter - filled with information on cetaceans and conservation issues.

WADAP is a charitable trust run by volunteers dedicated to raising funds for ongoing marine mammal research, education and conservation of the marine environment. www.adopt-a-dolphin.com
Commercial Cockle Harvesting in the top of the South

Cockles are a commercially fished species managed outside the Quota Management System (QMS) at present.

Since 1992 there has been a moratorium on new commercial cockle harvesting/fishing permits, the intention being as an interim measure prior to consideration of cockles being brought into the QMS.

In the COC7 fishery, which covers the West Coast North of around Haast and the entire top of the south area, including the Tasman, Nelson and Marlborough regions, there are two companies which have existing fishing permits for cockles.

Talleys Fisheries held a permit for harvesting of 35t per annum from a site of approx 500Ha at Tapu Bay, (N of Motueka) from 1992. In May 1997 the company applied for a variation to the permit, in respect of a site of 45Ha at Ferry Point, (just N of Collingwood, Golden Bay), some 55km in a direct line from the original site, and were granted a permit by the Ministry of Fisheries to harvest 334t per annum.

Westhaven Shellfish originally held a permit for 300t per annum from the intertidal area between Pakawau and Puponga, just S of Farewell Spit, Golden Bay, increased to 760t per annum since 1995.

In 1999 Talleys applied for a further variation at Ferry Point S and applied for a special permit for a biomass survey at Delaware Bay, just N of Nelson, while Westhaven applied for a variation to allow harvesting in Ruataniwha Inlet (the largest of the Golden Bay estuaries, on which Collingwood is located), and for a special permit for biomass surveys at Moutere Inlet (Motueka) and near Havelock in Pelorus Sound.

The harvesting operations are undertaken with low pressure tyred harvesters, which remove the top 5-10cm of sand containing the cockles and pass it over a sorting grill, and a 4 wheel farm bike and trailer for transport.

Unlike most fishing activities, all of these operations are sited in intertidal areas. All intertidal areas fall within the definition of wetland in s.2 of the Resource Management Act. The 1971 RAMSAR convention, ratified by New Zealand, deals with wetlands and especially waterfowl habitat, and s.6(a) of the RMA requires the preservation of the natural character of wetlands.

Cockle harvesting itself does not require resource consent, as s.12 of the RMA provides for lawful harvesting, but Regional Councils have the authority to control the effects of the disturbance of foreshore/seabed. Tasman District Council has taken the view that it does not require resource consent for such activities, apparently on the basis that if it did, it would need to require consent for all seabed disturbances, including scallop dredging and trawling, which would be never ending. Therefore the decision is left up to the Ministry of Fisheries.

Recent scientific work undertaken in Europe has indicated that large scale commercial harvesting in the Netherlands has caused significant adverse impacts, and that extensive cockle beds are important for many other species.

The matter has been raised with the Ministers for the Environment and Fisheries. Environment Minister, Marian Hobbs, has indicated that she does not totally agree with the way TDC has interpreted its role under the RMA in respect of s.12, but in essence neither Minister appears to be keen to do anything about the matter.

Points which arise include the interface between the Fisheries Act and RMA (the Environment Court proceedings on the Tasman Plan aquaculture provisions are not dealing with cockle harvesting), whether it is appropriate for intertidal shellfish harvesting to be dealt with under Fisheries legislation (with no right of appeal) rather than the RMA (which treats estuaries as of particular importance), whether QMS management is appropriate, whether "variations" which are widely spatially separated should be treated as new permits, and the matter of trade competition while the moratorium continues.

The top of the South has been inundated with applications for a total of over 10,000Ha of space for marine farming in the last year, and now faces the prospect of a very large increase in commercial cockle harvesting operations.

We would like to hear if comparable issues have been encountered with commercial shellfish harvesting elsewhere.

by Friends of Nelson Haven and Tasman Bay

Simple mollusc: gut, heart and blood vessels, reproductive organs and gills.
RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT

Sludge and Compost

Following the London Dumping Convention, sewage sludge is now prohibited from being dumped at sea as it is deemed to be too polluting. New Zealand now faces a national push to have sewage sludge composted and sold for use on suburban and agricultural land. Leading this push is the Living Earth Joint Venture.

This joint venture includes the composter The Living Earth Company Ltd and Waste Management NZ Ltd. Living Earth promotes the compost through its role as a major sponsor of the television programme "Maggie’s Garden Show". Viewers of the show might be surprised by what they have not been told regarding the makeup of the Wellington biosolids compost.

Wellington’s sewage sludge is mixed with other organic matter such as garden wastes and sawdust and composted by the Living Earth Joint Venture. Information obtained from the Living Earth Joint Venture states that their compost is made from a daily input of up to 100T of dewatered sludge, mixed with a further 42T of green waste. Thus their product could be over 70% sludge. Ironically they are paid high amounts to both receive the sludge and from retail sales of their final mixture.

It is important here to mention the term “biosolids”. No more sludge, we now have “biosolids”. The whole industry has adopted the biosolids euphemism, which appears to be designed to facilitate public acceptance of the composting of sludge.

The Living Earth Joint Venture recently applied to the Wellington Regional Council for consent to “increase the maximum allowable contaminant levels in the biosolids compost in respect of cadmium (Cd) from 3 mg/kg to 4 mg/kg, mercury from 1 mg/kg to 2 mg/kg and dieldrin from 0.02 mg/kg to 0.05 mg/kg”. They also sought to double the maximum allowable biosolids compost application rate to agricultural land.

To appreciate the significance of these increases a few quotes from the New Zealand Department of Health “Public Health Guidelines for the Safe Use of Sewage Effluent and Sewage Sludge on Land” (1992) may be helpful:

- “Metals that are both toxic and bioaccumulating like arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury present serious threats to the environment” (p. 29).
- “Studies have shown a clear linear relationship between cadmium concentrations in sludge amended soils and those in crops. Monitoring of heavy metal levels in the tissues of animals fed from sludge amended pasture revealed that cadmium was present in the highest levels most often” (p. 30).
- “It is estimated that a cow eats about 800 kg of soil per year” (p. 29).
- “All composted sludges must be ploughed into the soil” (p. 52). “For salad crops, fruit, other crops for human consumption which may be eaten unpeeled or uncooked there should be a waiting period of at least one year before crops are sown” (p. 52).
- “For pasture etc. and for crops which will be peeled or cooked before being eaten, fruit etc. should not be harvested or pastures grazed for at least 6 months after composted sludge application” (p. 53).
- “For forest, treeclots, bush and scrubland, public access should be restricted for one year. The buffer zones should be fenced and signposted.” (p. 53).
- “Any composted product to be sold or given away that includes sewage sludge as a constituent must be accompanied by a statement notifying users of the percentage of sewage sludge in the product and the treatment that it has undergone.” (p. 55).
- “The Department of Health does not intend to sanction the possible development of contaminated sites by condoning the use of sewage sludge with ‘high’ heavy metal contents” (p. 51).

Accordingly, the Department of Health states the recommended limit for heavy metals in soil as 3 mg/kg for cadmium and 1 mg/kg for mercury. These limits are comparable to limits in Australia, the UK and the European Community. Therefore the increases sought by Living Earth would result in compost which could exceed New Zealand and international contamination limits for soil. The latest New South Wales EPA limits for dieldrin in agricultural soil are only 0.02 mg/kg (the cadmium limit is only 1 mg/kg) which is much less than Living Earth’s proposed increase.

Despite opposition from a number of groups, the Wellington Regional Council granted the resource consent. The Southern Environmental Association (Inc.), a Wellington environmental group, lodged an appeal to the Environment Court. Action for Environment and Toxins Action Network applied to become parties to the appeal.

Unfortunately, changes to the RMA introduced in the RMA Amendment Act 1996 allow plaintiffs to seek the granting of orders for security of costs against appellant groups. The Living Earth Joint Venture, being well aware of this new clause in the RMA, sought (through their solicitors Chapman Tripp) an order of security of costs against the Southern Environmental Association (Inc.) of $50,000.

On 6th December 1999 Environment Court Judge Kenderdine decided, solely on the basis of Living Earth’s evidence, that the Southern Environment (Inc.) had to post a security of $30,000 (payable to the Environment Court by 13th December). Not surprisingly, the Southern Environmental Association (Inc.) did not have the funds to pay this security and the deadline of just seven days meant that it was not practicable to try and fundraise the money, so they had to drop their appeal.
The actions of the Living Earth Joint Venture are about a millimetre away from the typical U.S. corporate practice of using what are referred to as SLAPP Writs (Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation). So much for the RMA facilitating public participation in environmental decision making!

The seriousness of this issue can be appreciated by referring to the Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council “Guidelines for the Assessment and Management of Contaminated Sites” (1992) which sets levels of contamination that, when found, would initiate an environmental investigation. The level for cadmium is 3 mg/kg and the level for mercury is 1 mg/kg. Therefore the proposed increased mercury level in Living Earth compost could be double the level that would prompt an environmental investigation of a contaminated site. Typical background soil levels are cited as between 0.001 and 0.1 mg/kg.

Friends of the Earth understands that Living Earth is planning a large biosolids composting plant at the Mangere waste treatment plant site. The plant’s operator, Watercare, have stated that their plant’s sludge production will increase to 300 tonnes per day over the next 10 years. At the recent Water 2000 Conference (March, Auckland), the Living Earth information stand contained an information sheet by the Living Earth Joint Venture which stated that their Wellington compost “contamination levels and application rates that were approved may well become the basis of future national standards”. Friends of the Earth will vigorously oppose any further departure from national guidelines and good environmental practice. The Wellington decision needs to be appealed and the public should be better informed on this issue through the media.

It is crucial that any compost that is going to be spread on residential or agricultural land or any land that could be used for these purposes in the future, should not have contaminated levels that could prove damaging to human health or the receiving environment. Such safeguards have been incorporated into the New Zealand Department of Health guidelines and, in our view, must be adhered to.

Rather than raising limits above current guideline levels, there needs to be a reduction of toxic materials entering the system. This reduction should occur before sludge is processed into compost. It is sensible to return useful nutrients to the soil, but not when they may be accompanied by significant levels of heavy metal contaminants.

The above is an updated version of articles appearing in the Friends of the Earth December and April ‘EARTH’ bulletins.

For further information contact Friends of the Earth: PO Box 5599, Auckland; phone/fax 09 3034319; email focen@kcbbs.gen.nz

by Bob Tait

Safeguarding a City Marine Reserve - Our Experience in Auckland

The Long Bay-Okura Marine Reserve in Auckland’s North Shore City was opened late in 1995. This was the result of a campaign by a relatively small community group, The East Coast Bays Coastal Protection Society, set up primarily to establish this reserve.

The reserve encompasses coastal waters off Long Bay beach in North Shore City, and the estuary mouth of the adjacent Okura river. The adjoining land consists of two catchments. Both feed material into streams that discharge into the reserve. A 1996 Environment Court decision set the northern urban boundary for the city to include the catchment behind Long Bay beach. The Okura catchment is to remain non-urban. The land on both catchments is mostly privately owned in small and large blocks, and is largely undeveloped at present. This is prime coastal land of very high value, and there is intense pressure for development. Together with other local groups our Society is now working to protect the marine reserve from any effects of development.

There is also strong pressure from residents to have much of the area retained as a large park.

The local bodies involved set up meetings of concerned parties, and this process has been underway for two years now for the Okura catchment. Very significantly, the key factor restraining development at present is the presence of the marine reserve and the accepted need to protect it. So significant is this that the local councils commissioned a study by the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) of the effects of sediment deposition from a range of development schemes on the Okura catchment for which the allowable level of development is being hotly debated. This unique study has included surveying the catchment land form and soil types, developing computer models of sediment transfer, and laboratory and field trials of the effects of sediment on the marine life in the estuary. It was completed late last year and is now being extended to the Long Bay catchment.

NIWA has established what it calls a critical sediment load which, in its own words, ‘represents a severe ecological threat to the estuary’, and has estimated the frequency with which this is exceeded annually for the various development schemes. The local bodies appear to be interpreting this critical load as an acceptable maximum level of sedimentation, and are seeking a development scheme with the lowest exceedance rate. We and other groups have made submissions arguing that such sediment loading is completely unacceptable in a marine reserve and that development, if it is to proceed, must be looked at afresh. We feel that we are making some impact. We have placed the whole matter before Sandra Lee, Minister of Conservation.

The presence of this marine reserve and the efforts of local groups has resulted in a very unusual process being undertaken by the local councils involved. We now need advice as to how better to protect our marine reserve.

For further details contact: R E White, 34 Peter Terrace, Castor Bay, Auckland 9; e-mail: r.white@auckland.ac.nz

R E White, Executive Committee East Coast Bays Coastal Protection Society

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Was it a Vote for the Environment?

The Government’s Six Month Performance Report

We assess the performance of the government against the Key Commitments in the Vote for the Environment Charter, published in August 1999 by ECO, Forest and Bird, FMC and Greenpeace.

one We called for protection from logging of the 130,000 ha of West Coast forest managed by Timberlands West Coast (TWC), the disestablishment of TWC, and the transfer of exotic forests to a newbody providing local economic benefits. As is well known, the government has agreed to halt logging but not until April 2002 – the year of the next election. It is deplorable that rimu contracts have been allowed to continue. Thanks to Helen Clarke, Pete Hodgson, Sandra Lee, Jill Pettis and others for the intended eventual cessation of logging.

No thanks to those who have pressed for continued logging. The astonishing tactics of Michael Cullen and Jim Anderton’s public announcement that they were going to press the case for rimu logging against Labour policy was the first major falter of the government. The payment of $120m to the West Coasters is extraordinary and unmerited, though we agree with the idea of a package. It is more than six times as much as this year’s allocation in the biodiversity package.

We await some public written commitment to the early and full protection and transfer to DoC of the indigenous forests including especially Saltwater and North Okarito forests. Funding for DoC management and pest control will be required as part of this package.

The second commitment was an "increase in baseline Department of Conservation funding by $200 million over three years, with priority given to threatened species, habitat protection and restoration, pastoral lease property purchases, pest control and conservation advocacy.”

The Biodiversity budget package is welcome - $187 million for biodiversity over five years, with $18m for the year 2000-01. But not all of this is for DoC. Looking just at DoC, the government has provided a total of about $64.5 million to DoC over the next three years, and with annual increases in the two years after that. But this is not necessarily base funding and has to have offset against it losses from the end of National’s “Green Package”.

It is clear that the campaign run by Forest and Bird for much greater attention to biosecurity has been effective. The government is taking the matter more seriously than its predecessor and has provided modest funds for this purpose over the next five years.

Excluding non-departmental funding from the Conservation budget, the 2000/01 budget provides $185.8 million for DoC against $172.4 million provided in 1999/2000 (of which $163.6 million was actually spent). This represents an increase in budgeted funding of 7.7%, but not all of this is an increase in baseline funding.

three The third Vote for the Environment key commitment was for the replacement of MAF with a Ministry of Biosecurity incorporating MAF Quarantine, and a Ministry of Food. We asked for residual functions to be reallocated, variously to the Ministry for the Environment and the Ministry of Commerce (now the Ministry of Economic Development). So far there is no sign of these changes though it is apparent that the government is taking the question of improving biosecurity - control of the importation of new organisms and of their spread around NZ and the seas we manage much more seriously. The finds of snakes, mites and wasps are graphic illustrations of the need for this though it is probably the unrecorded imports of insects that is most dangerous - as the varroa mite on bees has shown.

four A shift of emphasis of taxation wayfrom expendi-ture and jobs (ie GST and income tax) and instead onto environmentally damaging activities has not happened.

Neither is there any clear commitment to this. The taxation review may be an opportunity to address this. ECO supporters and others should continue to press for a greenhouse gas emission charge and for other revenue switching to charges for environmental bads.

five Just as there is no sign of any immediate greenhouse gas emission charge, neither is there evidence that the government will adopt a strategy of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 20% or more that 1990 levels by 2008-12. Climate change is specified as one of five priority areas for the Ministry for the Environment, and there is money in the budget for policy work on the issue. The Greens have pressed the government on energy efficiency and in the $15m special Green Budget Package, $3 million taken under National from the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority has been restored. Jeanette Fitzsimmon’s Energy Efficiency Bill has also been passed. None of this though is systematic enough to demonstrate the commitment required.

six On genetically engineered organisms, government, under pressure from the Greens and the Alliance, has established the Royal Commission to review GMOs – but has refused a five year moratorium on field testing and commercial release of GMOs, agreeing only to a voluntary moratorium.

seven "a phase out of chlorinated PVC plastic, chlorinated solvents and anti sapstain and timber treatment chemicals still registered for use" has not been done – though our phase out date is December 2002. To achieve this, urgent work and promotion of policy now to effect our targets is needed so that the timber industry and others have time to arrange substitutes. The Budget provides for work on pollutants and hazardous substances but it is unclear whether the government accepts our
policy targets and there has been no explicit commitment to them. Unless work is done very soon, these targets will become unachievable.

We asked for commitment to "the establishment of Marine Environmental Management with integrating legislation to achieve comprehensive management of the marine environment consistent with the UN Law of the Sea, the UN Fisheries Agreement and the Convention on Biodiversity." The government has agreed to develop an Oceans Strategy and budgeted a meagre $2.5 million over three years for this task. It has pointedly refrained from committing to legislative reform and has taken pains to stress that it is looking at a strategy for an integration of oceans management, not necessarily for environmental reform.

There is a significant danger that this process will become mainly the preserve of the Ministry of Fisheries and other agencies that regulate access to resources, rather than a strong environmental reform. The Ministry for the Environment and DoC should both be organised and resourced to be effective players in this reform – neither is. In contrast, the Ministry of Fisheries seems positioned to direct the reform – despite its documented incompetence and lack of will to discharge its own environmental responsibilities since (and before) the passage of its 1996 Fisheries Act. Both the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment and the Office of the Auditor General have given the Ministry of Fisheries significantly adverse reports. Pete Hodgson, the new Minister of Fisheries is working on changing this, but the Ministry's budget and work plan show that the environment remains the Cinderella of their work.

Government's retention of control and administration of fisheries management, research and enforcement rather than devolving these functions to the fishing industry is a key commitment that looks to be in jeopardy. Fisheries Minister Pete Hodgson has publicly voiced his doubts on the wisdom of devolution and "direct purchase" of fisheries services by the industry. For all this, he will not formally announce that such work is to stop. Instead there are hundreds of thousands of dollars assigned in the Ministry of Fisheries' work plan to advance this hand over to the industry. The Ministry appears to be full steam ahead on this though "direct purchase" of certain research projects was deferred after Pete Hodgson stopped some projects. The "direct purchase" work in our view should be stopped altogether and the Fisheries Amendment Act 1999 that allows for devolution should be repealed.

Introduction of requirements for environmental impact assessments for fishing activity might result from an "environmental strategy" that the Ministry of Fisheries has decided to develop over the next two years. The team consists of only two people – an excessively modest effort compared to the vast resources still to be devoted to organising rights for recreational and commercial fishers, arranging for the industry to provide fisheries management services and the like. This year, urgent attention to several fisheries sustainability decisions is being denied, apparently due to insufficient priority being given.

More encouraging is the government's response to commitment eleven. This is to "provide safe refuges for marine life and enhance sustainable fisheries management by establishing marine protected areas including protecting 5% of New Zealand's marine area by which we mean the Territorial Sea and the EEZ" as no-take marine reserves and marine protected areas by 2002 and with 20% protected by 2010.

In the National Biodiversity Strategy there is a commitment to marine protected areas over 10% of the EEZ in marine protected areas by 2010. The Biodiversity funding package contains a total of $11.5 million for this work over five years. There is a review of the Marine Reserves Act underway now. A major problem will be whether Sandra Lee and others in the government can find ways to overcome the blockage to marine reserves formed by a coalition of fishing and some Maori interests. The Biodiversity package also contains a total of $14.1 million for better marine information over five years.

The Minister for the Environment has not made her intentions clear with respect to the amendments to the Resource Management Act Amendment Bill. We asked the government to commit to "oppose the amendments to the RMA which restrict public participation or weaken environmental assessment provisions." The government has said that it will not proceed with the amendments to allow contestability of consent consideration, hearings going directly to the high court, and the use of Commissioner only hearings.

Ominously the government has not given any assurances it will drop the amendments allowing even greater non-notification of resource consent applications (already 95% of consents are not notified), the redefinition of amenity values, the repeal of non-complying activity status or the redefinitions of public notice and of working days. Nor has the government said whether it will stop the provisions of the Bill relating to subdivision on land to go forward, and those relating to proposed plans taking effect.

There are many other matters that the Action on Community and the Environment coalition has pressed to have changed in the Bill that the government has not indicated that it will change. Urgent pressure on the government regarding these matters is required.

The Green's package in the budget provides for a very welcome (albeit a one off) provision of $1 million for environmental legal aid. When it was announced it was said that applications will be made to the Ministry for the Environment. We hope this fund is available for actions under the Fisheries Act as well as the RMA. The government has hinted that it would examine the question of legal aid for environmental and community groups.

We asked parties to commit that Treaty of Waitangi grievance resolutions would use productive Crown Resources rather than Conservation Land. We have not been able to judge the government: on this since there have been no further settlements.

Maintenance and enhancement of public foot access to the public conservation estate and along the coast and waterways except where ecologically damaging has not been obviously enhanced or compromised.
Undaria in Golden Bay

Referred to as the “Gorse of the Sea” but commonly known as Asian kelp, Undaria Pinnatifida is now well established on the Collingwood mussel farm in Golden Bay.

Its presence there has been known since 1996 but not widely known about until late 1999. General awareness occurred as a result of the release of a report prepared by Daniel Lees for Tasman District Council and Department of Conservation, following intense lobbying from Forest and Bird’s local branch. The report surfaced in the Environment Court enquiry into provisions for aquaculture in Golden Bay and Tasman Bay.

Forest and Bird together with Friends of Golden Bay Society has sought the eradication of Undaria from the Collingwood marine farm and scheduled meetings with both Fisheries and Department of Conservation. Fisheries has now postponed that meeting indefinitely, pending the completion of a National Pest Management Strategy. It is unclear when that will occur.

We believe that if undertaken now, eradication of undaria from the Golden Bay mussel farm is possible. However the general thrust of a Fisheries discussion paper “Options for a National Pest Management Strategy for the Asian Kelp Undaria” (Jan 2000) is that generally eradication is not practical and a policy of preventing its spread to High Value Areas is the best option.

Two of these areas are the Abel Tasman National Park and Wanganui Inlet (marine reserve). These areas sit either side of the contaminated marine farm in Golden Bay. It would seem logical then that an eradication programme for this mussel farm should be high on the list of priorities. It appears the only action to date is a meeting between representatives of Collingwood Marine Farms Consortium, the Ministry of Fisheries and Tasman District Council with a view to implementing a voluntary management regime.

At this stage, environmental groups can only engage in intense lobbying of Ministers and Local Authorities to enforce what limited rules apply, or seek plan changes to include provisions for eradication of the pest.

Apart from Old Glory Bay, Stewart Island, and Bluff, where DOC are engaged in a multimillion dollar eradication attempt, Undaria infestations have already gained a level of acceptance that precludes anything other than control and management. Indeed there are elements that see the commercial seafood opportunities presented by the harvesting of undaria as attractive.

Any National Pest Management Strategy must be given some teeth. It is essential that they can be exercised on individuals or bodies who have employed flawed management practices resulting in the spread of Undaria. There is little likelihood of it being made retrospective.

The absence of this weed from Port Tarakohe and the Wainui Bay marine farm suggests it was inadvertently introduced to Collingwood by contaminated gear or spat transfer from Marlborough Sounds. It readily attaches to any hard surface including wharf piles, boats, marine farm ropes and anchors. Reports from Victoria, Australia indicate Undaria’s ability to attach to seagrasses also and if correct this poses a severe threat to Golden Bay’s extensive beds of eelgrass (Zostera), the staple diet of much of our coastal fauna. It is a tragedy that eradication was not attempted in 1996 when undaria was first identified in Golden Bay.

Alan Vaughan
Friends of Golden Bay Society.

Green Ribbon Award Winners

Congratulations to Di and Graham McBride of Te Kowhai, Waikato, winners of the rural category of the Green Ribbon Awards for the year 2000 announced on 14 June.

The McBride’s have linked good business and good environmental management through the sustainable farming practices they apply on their farm. Their philosophy of total integrated management takes into account all factors – animal and human welfare, food safety and quality, and the protection of flora and fauna. ECO would like to recognise the Graham’s efforts over the years raising awareness of the need to control toxic substance use.

Other winners were:
- Business and industry category: Pukekohe Vegetable Growers Association for the Franklin Sustainability Project.
- Community and local government category: Amberley Residents Association, Hurumui District, North Canterbury, developed a community initiative to reduce and recycle waste.
- Maori category: Liz Burge, of Carterton, for her activities as a Maori resource management spokesperson over the past 10 years.
- Environmental education category: Guides New Zealand for their “Save It” campaign which focuses guides on learning about and doing something positive for a specific plant or animal

The Green Ribbon Awards carry no prize or financial recognition, but are a public acknowledgment of the work individuals, organisations and businesses have put into protecting and improving the environment.
Toothfishing out of Control

Fishing for Antarctic and Patagonian toothfish in the Southern Ocean is out of control. Three to five times as much or more is caught illegally or without authorisation as is legally permitted.

Fishing in the Southern Ocean is governed by the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, CCAMLR — and also often, by domestic legislation of countries. ECO has joined others in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition in calling for a moratorium on toothfishing in the Southern Ocean — at least until there is an effective fisheries management regime and control of illegal and unauthorised fishing. ECO has asked the New Zealand government to take the proposal to a Southern Ocean toothfishing moratorium to the October/November 2000 CCAMLR meeting in Hobart.

Patagonian toothfish and Antarctic toothfish are highly vulnerable to critical stock damage because they are long lived, slow growing animals. Another negative environmental impact of toothfishing is that albatross and petrel species are suffering drastic population collapses. This is because of birds drowning on baited longlines which can be up to five km long with tens of thousands of hooks. It is estimated by British Antarctic Survey ornithologist Dr John Croxall that 100,000 birds are drowned annually by the long lining, of which 10,000 — 20,000 are albatross, especially wandering albatross. Various petrel species are particularly hard hit. The mortality rates are far beyond what the populations can withstand and virtually all albatross and petrel species within long line fisheries interactions are threatened.

Alistair Graham, prime mover of Hobart’s Isofish, the International Southern Ocean Longline Information Clearing House and from the Tasmanian Conservation Trust, visited New Zealand recently at ECO’s invitation. He spoke in Wellington and Christchurch and met officials and ministers to discuss the issue. DoC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the visit. Old ECO lands will recognise Alistair as our executive officer in the early 1980s. We were happy to have him back.

Isofish is essentially a private intelligence organisation but it is not secret and it works in the public interest. Founded in 1998, it began as a project jointly funded by Austral Fisheries and the Tasmanian Conservation Trust. Funding is now received from the Packard Foundation in the USA.

Isofish tracks and exposes the vessels, skippers, companies, owners, and activities of fish poachers — publishing reports which name names and identifies the ports that accept illegal fishing — and the freighting and marketing networks and markets for illegal product.

It is frequently argued that a moratorium on toothfishing would be counterproductive on the grounds that legal fishers in the Southern Ocean help keep out illegals by being there. Isofish says that presence at sea or in the air is not the key to policing poachers. Instead, Alistair Graham says that there are close links of commerce and in some cases leasing and ownership between legal and illegal fishers and that the moratorium would help to break these cosy relationships. In his view the real work of detection has to be done via the ports and markets that accept illegal product. What is needed is a package of port, market and other controls in tandem with a moratorium. Detection of such port and market activity coupled with diplomatic pressure is needed.

Poached toothfish has been landed commonly in Mauritius, Namibia, Montevideo in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. Much of the processing is done in Chile and China, with markets in Japan (70%), China and USA. Spanish and Norwegian vessels and companies are significant poachers, the Spanish employ Belize nationals. Poaching vessels often use flags of convenience and company registrations in countries that don’t ask too many questions: Belize, Panama, Cayman Islands, St Lucia and the Grenadines, Vanuatu and others.

Under pressure from Isofish and others, Norway has introduced a black listing system for poachers, their companies and their vessels.

Action:

Write to Helen Clark PM, Phil Goff, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Pete Hodgson (Minister of Fisheries); Sandra Lee, Minister of Conservation and Phillida Bunkle, Minister of Customs outlining your concerns and asking New Zealand to take a request to CCAMLR for a moratorium, port and market controls. Send your submission or letter to each Minister, Parliament Buildings, Wellington (no stamp required).
Sustainability test for Fisheries Minister

This year’s fisheries sustainability round will be a test for the Minister of Fisheries, Pete Hodgson. Major cuts to, or closure of, some orange roughy fisheries is needed as is protection of a range of seamount features.

Due in part to the inaction of the previous Minister of Fisheries, John Luxton, orange roughy stocks are in a dire state. The Challenger orange roughy fishery, which is found about 200 nautical miles east of New Plymouth is estimated at only three percent of what it was in 1980 when fishing started. Conservation groups are urging Pete Hodgson to close this fishery to enable recovery of the stock.

None of the orange roughy stocks can be said to be above there minimum level of 20 percent of what they were in 1980. The East Cape stock, where fishing only started in 1994, is down to 14 percent of its initial population size and the Mid-East Cape stock, which centres on Ritchie Bank off Mahia Peninsula, has been reduced to just 10 percent. Reducing catch limits is required for these stocks and, reductions to catch limits are also likely to be needed in future years in the Chatham Rise orange roughy stocks.

Reduction in catch limits is required to combat depletion of deepwater orees on the Chatham Rise where both black and smooth orees have been reduced to low levels.

The Minister of Fisheries is also looking at moves to close to bottom trawling a mere 19 (or so) seamounts out of 600 to 800 that exist in the New Zealand zone. Seamounts, which include hills or ridges, are under threat internationally as they are fished for a range of deepwater species including orange roughy, orees and alfonsinos. Bottom trawling has been documented to wreck coral and other benthic species found on seamounts. Some of these corals are up to 4-5 metres tall and have been aged by NIWA at up to 500 years old.

A review of seamount biology by NIWA for DOC indicates that some species are only found in localised areas and therefore face a significant risk of extinction. Some species identified by NIWA were initially common in trawl nets but have not been seen for many years. Australian researchers have also discovered that many more species of corals, sponges, sea fans and other organisms live on sea mounts in the world’s oceans than was previously thought.

More has to be done than protecting 19 seamounts. A precautionary approach should be taken to fishery management around all seamounts. Given the evidence of the impacts of fishing on seamounts and the obligations in the Fisheries Act to “avoid, remedy or mitigate” the effects of fishing moves must be taken to protect all seamounts.

Submissions on orange roughy catch limits and seamounts close on 10 July. For further information contact ECO.

Toothfishing: NZ Connections

New Zealand companies Sealords, Amaltal and Sanfords have a joint venture, SS fishing. They have operated vessels in the Southern Ocean over the last three years under exploratory fishing permits issued under the CCAMLR Act by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. New Zealand vessels also require fishing permits.

This year, two of the New Zealand vessels were arrested for breach of their permit conditions. Company representatives appeared in Court in Wellington in mid June but the case has been remanded to an August hearing in Nelson.

Separately the New Zealand government has found itself in a diplomatic pickle because a New Zealand flagged vessel full of toothfish is languishing in Montevideo without catch documentation records required before toothfish can be offloaded. New Zealand had joined other countries in pressing Uruguay to be more rigorous and not to accept illegal catch.

The vessel, the Polar Viking, is operated by Norwegian blacklisted Norse Fisheries. The Polar Viking is the renamed San Aotea which was sold by Sanfords to a New Zealand registered company used by the black listed Norwegian company. The San Aotea II, a different vessel, was one of those arrested this year after fishing in the Ross Sea and then allowed to return to the NZ Zone to fish on board.

ECO sympathises with the New Zealand government’s embarrassment at the NZ flag vessel’s interception. We ask the government to request the Uruguayans to detain the Polar Viking and its catch so that New Zealand can arrest it for failure to obtain a fishing permit and various other offences. We believe that the vessel cannot substantiate its claim that its catch was taken in international waters, rather than poached from CCAMLR waters. We deplore Sanfords’ sale of this vessel to a company with black listed connections.

Other New Zealand connections with toothfishing are crew who are known to have left authorised vessels and taken their knowledge to illegal vessels.

For more information on illegal, unauthorised and unreported (IUU) fishing in the Southern Ocean check out the toothfish site: www.toofish.org.au.
CITES: Whales, Sharks and Other Matters

In April Japan and Norway, in their global push to legalise commercial whaling and the trade in whale meat, proposed to get the latest meeting of CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species) to reclassify several whale species. All proposals were defeated but Japan openly sought to buy-off support from many countries for their position.

CITES regulates the trade in endangered species and Appendix I (the most stringent listing) and lists contained in Appendix II provide different controls on the trade in the species. There are 151 countries who are members of CITES.

Japan proposed reclassifying as less endangered grey whales and minke whale populations in the Pacific while Norway proposed reclassifying minke whale populations in the North Pacific. The Japanese proposals failed to gain a majority let alone the two-thirds support required. Although the initial Norwegian proposal failed to gain a majority a revised proposal at the end of the meeting gained a bare majority by one vote but was again well short of the two-thirds required.

Despite being unsuccessful in their whaling efforts, the two countries managed to build a coalition of states opposed to moves to list a range of threatened fish species on the CITES lists. Australia promoted the listing of great white shark while the UK promoted the listing of basking sharks for annex II listing. Both proposals gained support from a majority of countries, but failed to gain the two-thirds majority required for measures to be approved. These listings were supported by the New Zealand government, but the local fishing industry was opposed to the listing of these species. The basking shark listing failed by just six votes while the white shark listing failed by 22 votes.

The debate between different African countries over whether to allow the trade in elephant ivory reached consensus with proposals to allow ivory trade being withdrawn.

Environmental Legal Aid

As part of the Budget the Greens secured $1 million for environmental legal aid in the 2000-01 financial year to be administered by the Ministry for the Environment.

In its Election Manifesto, Labour stated that it intended to set up an environmental legal aid scheme. The idea is not a new one — it was intended to form part of the Resource Management Act suite of reforms. However, among other things, cost considerations saw any proposal for legal aid cut from the RMA and the Legal Services Act review in 1991. This has resulted in a reduction of the ability of the environment to have its voice heard through people advocating on its own behalf.

Now that environmental legal aid has been placed on the political landscape, decisions must be made as to how such legal aid should be structured. Questions such as how the fund should be administered, who should be entitled to funding, should the funding be limited to environmental groups and should funds be channelled through community law centres, environmental defenders offices or direct to environmental groups need to be considered. Furthermore should the polluter pays principle also apply to applicants for large developments to ensure that the legal aid budget is not blown out by a few high profile cases.

Quentin Davies has written part of his masters of laws on the topic of public interest legal aid. He can be contacted at qdavies@yahoo.co.nz

In addition, last year Sandra Lee introduced a Resource Management (costs) Bill to remove the chance of responsible public interest litigants having costs awarded against them. There are several cases, including the famous Coromandel Watchdog case associated with the now closed Waitekauri mine, where groups have been stung with environmental costs.

ECO welcomes feedback on the allocation of environmental legal aid.
Genetic Engineering Commission soon underway

Former Chief Justice Sir Thomas Eichelbaum heads a four-person Royal Commission that will inquire into genetic engineering. Funding has been allocated in the 2000 Budget with the Commission due to start its work on 1 July, and report back 12 months later.

The Royal Commission's chief objective is to inquire into and report on the strategic options available to enable New Zealand to address genetic modification now and in the future. It may also recommend any changes in the current legislative, regulatory, policy or institutional arrangements for addressing genetic modification technologies and products in New Zealand.

The former Chief Justice is joined on the Commission by:

- Dr Jean Fleming, Senior Lecturer, Department of Anatomy and Structural Biology, Otago Medical School. She is highly qualified in the field of Biochemistry, Physiology and Structural Biology
- Rev Richard Randerson, of Auckland who has an extensive academic background in religious studies and brings a solid understanding of ethical issues to the Commission.
- Dr Jacqueline Allan, a GP of Auckland with considerable experience in the area of Maori medical health. She brings an understanding of both medical and Maori issues to the Commission.

Agreement has been reached with industry and research organisations over a voluntary moratorium on field tests or general release of genetically modified organisms. Under the moratorium potential applicants will not seek approval from ERMA to import, field test or release a genetically modified organism from containment. The voluntary moratorium will remain in place until the Government has considered the Commission's findings.

Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise

Figures released in June by the Ministry of Economic Development show that New Zealand's gross carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from the energy and industrial process sectors increased by 19.2% between 1990 and 1999. This compares with 14% growth from 1990-1998. Average annual growth over 1990-1999 is 2.0%.

A round half of energy CO2 emissions is from liquid fuels use, over a third from natural gas use and 11% from coal use. Electricity generation saw a large increase in greenhouse gas emissions in 1999 compared to 1998 (up 34%) due to reduced hydro generation because of relatively low lake levels. This resulted in greater use of thermal generation, mainly gas (up 33%) and coal (up 47%).

The report also covers other energy sector greenhouse gas emissions including methane and nitrous oxide. Methane accounts for about half of New Zealand's emissions when they are assessed for their global warming potential. New Zealand's methane emissions have been declining. The report updates methane emissions to December 31, 1998 (a year behind the energy sector data) and shows they have decreased by 5% since 1990.

South Pacific Whales Sanctuary

At the meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Adelaide in early July, Sandra Lee, Minister of Conservation and an Australian Minister jointly presented a proposal for a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary.

The proposal received the unanimous support of the IUCN-World Conservation Union Oceania Region Members Meeting in March, and is consistent with earlier Resolutions of IUCN.

Unfortunately, the resolution did not receive the three-quarter majority required and as a result was not passed.
Conferences

Kotare: Research and Education for Social Change
Te Tiriti o Waitangi Issues for Environmentalists
July 14-16 Kotare Education Centre, 536 Waipu, Station Rd, Hatoe North, Wellsford
Ph:09 379 8545

Making Cycling Viable Conference
July 14-15 International Student Centre, Complex, Turitea Campus, Massey University, Palmerston North

Working more effectively in a Legal Environment under the Resource Management Act: Lincoln University
Christchurch: September 8
Dunedin: September 12
Auckland: October 9
Wellington: October 10

Will the NZ Enact the Genesis: Dialogue on the ethics of GE
Friday August 25 9:15am - 5pm St Johns Conference Centre, Willis Street, Wellington

ECO Organic Beverage Tasting Fundraiser with special guest
Marian Hobbs
Thursday 27 July 6pm - 8:30pm
Turnbull House, Bowen Street, Wellington. Tickets $15 un waged/ $20 waged. Contact the ECO office for details and buying tickets.

ECO Annual Conference and AGM
25-27 August 2000 Tahuna Beach, Nelson. Contact the ECO Office for information and to register.

ECO Annual Conference - Strategies for Environmental Gains

ECO’s 2000 conference will focus on the art of campaigning. It will be an opportunity for sharing experiences, opinions and information. The conference is aimed at members of environmental organisations and other citizen groups, or individuals keen to create positive change.

The Annual Conference programme offers ‘variety-plus’, both in terms of the activities scheduled, as well as in the material that will be covered. Three workshops have been organised, which will present attendees with the opportunity to develop skills in strategic design, direct-action, cyber-activism and global protests. Likewise, field-trips to areas of particular environmental interest have been arranged as part of the programme. The “Saturday Night Live” variety performance offers a chance to unwind and socialise with other participants.

To register for the Conference or to make general enquiries, please contact the ECO office: 04 385 7545 or email eco@reddish.co.nz

KEA Celebrates 10 Year Anniversary

ECO Member group, Kapiti Environmental Action Inc celebrated it’s 10th Anniversary on the 27th of June 2000. KEA’s inception sprang from local interest in both monitoring the Council’s environmental decision-making and carrying out some revegetation work.

Perhaps the ‘icing on the cake’ best describes KEA’s recent success in presenting its concerns about the Kaitiaki Park subdivision to the Environment Court. A group effort saw the Court accept compelling evidence in relation to the Scientific Reserve. The site can still be used for residential purposes, but at a lower density level, which was one of KEA’s main arguments.

For information on joining KEA, contact June Rowland on 04 299 8055 or Heather Frankerd on 04 902 1705.

Vital Signs 2000

A new report from the Worldwatch Institute, Vital Signs 2000: The Environmental Trends That Are Shaping Our Future, provides a snapshot of current environmental issues facing the planet. A key theme is how inequalities of wealth, power, opportunities, and survival prospects among the world’s peoples are confounding efforts to reverse environmental degradation.

The report is the ninth in the series prepared by the Institute funded by the United Nations Population Fund and the W. Alton Jones Foundation, and the news is pretty bleak.

“From the global digital divide to the devastating AIDS and tuberculosis epidemics, the trends in Vital Signs 2000 are exposing numerous fault lines between the North and the South, within nations, and between men and women,” said Worldwatch Senior Researcher Michael Renner, co-author of the report.

Although the world economy pumped out nearly $41 trillion of goods and services in 1999, 45 percent of the income went to the 12 percent of the world’s people who live in western industrial countries.

“This wealthy minority is largely responsible for the excessive consumption that drives environmental decline,” said co-author Molly O. Sheehan, Worldwatch Research Associate.

Visit the Worldwatch site for more information www.worldwatch.org

• Disclaimer

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Submissions

- Office of Hon Pete Hodgson: Review of Sustainability Measures and Other Management Controls for the 2000-01 Fishing Year. Submissions to be received by 10 July.
- MFISH: Setting of TACS and TACCs for the South Island Freshwater Eel Fishery. Submissions by Friday 23 July.
- MFISH: Proposed Deemed Values for selecting fishstocks to be Effective from 1 October 2000. Submissions by 28 July 2000
- MIE: Resource Management (Marine Pollution) Regulations discussion document, comments sought by 31 July.

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