

## **BIODIVERSITY**

### **NEW ZEALAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY**

The plants and animals of New Zealand evolved for 80 million years in isolation from the other landmasses on the planet. They became so distinctive that our country has been described as the closest scientists will get to studying life on another planet.

We boast the worlds only flightless parrot (Kakapo), a bird with nostrils at the end of it's beak (Kiwi), a primitive frog that bears live young (Leiopelma species), a large insect which fills a role that small rodents play in other countries (Giant Weta) and many other exceptional species.

High percentages of New Zealand's indigenous species are endemic, that is, they are found nowhere else on earth.

This level of endemism is remarkable internationally.

Both species of bat are endemic, as are all 4 frogs, all 60 reptiles, more than 90 percent of insects and a similar percentage of marine molluscs, about 80 percent of vascular plants, and a quarter of all bird species.

In contrast, Great Britain which separated from continental Europe a mere 10,000 years ago, has two endemic species: One plant and one animal.

New Zealand has been identified as one of the top 25 centres of overall worldwide diversity.

We are the only developed country with this status.

NEW ZEALAND'S BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

OUR CHANCE TO TURN THE TIDE

In 1993 New Zealand ratified an international agreement. The Convention on Biological Diversity, just one of five major United Nations agreements on environmental management.

A draft Biodiversity strategy for New Zealand has been released after Cabinet approval as a basis for consultation to engage and involve interested organisations, groups and people in constructive dialogues about the future of New Zealand's biodiversity.

The strategy also meets the requirement in the Convention on Biological Diversity for signatory nations to prepare national strategies or plans to translate the provisions of the International Convention into National terms.

One of the key actions proposed through the Draft Strategy is the introduction of a National Policy Statement on biodiversity.

A National Policy Statement is an instrument available under the Resource management Act 1991.

In support of having such a National Policy Statement, the Draft Strategy says:

A National Policy Statement provides the opportunity for Central Government to give clear policy directions on how protection of indigenous biodiversity should be approached within the context of the RMA and the interests of the Crown in freshwater and geothermal resources.

Other options such as guidelines and best practice advice will not provide the same certainty of the outcomes sought as a National Policy Statement.

## CONCLUSION

My opinion on the effectiveness of a Biodiversity National Policy Statement can be likened to my experiences relating to Regional Policy Statements. One of the policy statements I have researched includes 60 pages of ecosystem protection in a 200 page document;

This Regional Council does not have any operational procedures internally to require sustainability of indigenous flora, fauna and biodiversity.

They will argue of course that they are primarily a planning body. However their Parks and Forestry budgets are very large and it could be they, who are seen to be setting an example to their affected Local Authorities.

These Regional Policy Statements are guidelines for all of New Zealand's Local Authorities, for District Plans of which the District Plan must not be inconsistent with the Regional Policy Statement. (RMA)

My research of District Plans varies to one Council interpreting the 60-200 page example, by use of four words to convey all the meaning of the 60 pages of ecosystem protection.

The four words being 'Ecological Values' and 'Significant Vegetation'.

Other Councils are very creative and have produced inspiring statements, paragraphs or joined Agenda 21, all of which is lost on the Council management and councilors who may not understand the biodiversity concept fully and therefore do not implement actions, pass resolutions or identify expenditure in Annual Plans.

The 'four words' City Council example actually practices indigenous biodiversity to a very high degree, and not a single management plan makes reference to anything indigenous.

I recognise that in this case, like so many, it is the caliber of the individuals involved that supersedes any document.

The Biodiversity Strategy and the National Policy Statement will be welcomed by sympathetic planners, and used as a tool by the field workers to pressure their management for funds to maintain some significant habitat somewhere. However I am under no illusion that we may lose most of our biodiversity before the tide is turned.

REFERENCE:

A summary of New Zealand's Biodiversity Strategy Prepared by Glen Lauder.

- Fred Allen is a manager of Kiwi Plants LTD.

This Company is based in Wellington, and advocates for indigenous flora and biodiversity and also grows supplies and manages indigenous restoration projects.

The Executive Committee of Keep Hutt City Beautiful recognises the significance of indigenous Biodiversity within Hutt City, and wishes to make the following statements.

1. The Committee interprets Biodiversity or Biological Diversity to describe the variety of all biological plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain and the terrestrial, marine and or other aquatic ecosystems in which they live.

Source: Ministry for the Environment Biodiversity Strategy Team.

2. The Committee proposes to
  - a) Develop public support for biodiversity.
  - b) Encourage a greater awareness and understanding of indigenous biodiversity and their habitats.
  - c) To act with a high level of awareness toward indigenous biodiversity.
  - d) To support others who practice sustainability of indigenous biodiversity.