Te Koiroa o Te Koiora

Our shared vision for living with nature

New Zealand's Next Biodiversity Strategy

Response from the [Takaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust](#)

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The Takaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust comprises the landowners of Takaka Hill, in Tasman, residents together holding 3,000 hectares of land in varying stages of ecological development, from untouched native sub-alpine beech forest, to regenerating native forest, scrub and grassland.

It includes working farms, pine forestry plantations, a limestone quarry, and lifestyle blocks. The private lands offer a number of publically accessible recreational activities, including walking, cycling, caving, rock climbing, hang gliding and micro-light flight, with long-established pathways (The Old Coach Road, the Old Provincial Bridle Path, The QEII Takaka Hill Walkway,) kept open and accessible by landholders, as well as by DoC staff and the local Council.

The land mass is unusual in that it links two National Parks: the Abel Tasman and the Kahurangi. Landowners are acutely aware of the need to protect this land-bridge, a crossover point for native species - but also, potentially, a 'predator ark,' as Department of Conservation and associated groups (Project Janszoon, Forest and Bird, Birdsong Trust, Friends of the Flora,) work to eradicate pest species on public parks and reserves.

The Takaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust runs its own programmes of predator control and eradication, working to manage feral goats, pigs, possums, stoats, and rats, as well as wasps, and invasive pest plants such as banana passion fruit, old man's beard, gorse, blackberry, cotoneaster, Spanish heath and wilding pines.

In relation to the proposed Policy, we make the following observations.

1.0 Recognition of landowner collaboration on the work of biodiversity conservation

We are pleased to see a growing consciousness within biodiversity policy of the need to work with, and recognise the work of, landowners.

'New Zealand provides comparatively few incentives for landowners to conserve biodiversity' (p. 16).

We need to find new and more active ways to support this work. As the document comments, the work landowners do benefits all - but the costs, and the labour, are borne by few.

We believe the time is close where rather than biodiversity work being subject to funding via a 'lolly-scramble' of competitive grant applications, a more secure and forward-projecting funding flow should be negotiated, through such mechanisms as local rates or tax rebates - including, for instance, GST exemptions on conservation tools and consumables.

In the interim, our own solutions are three-fold:

1. We undertake collaborative projects with local industry partners, building towards, for instance, a 2050 goal (p. 33): 'Every business is helping to restore nature.'

2. We maximise the outcomes of funding received from public and philanthropic bodies, by project management principles, good governance and financial management, best practice pest plant and predator control programmes and scrupulous re-cycling of materials used in projects.

3. We 'mass' and 'step' our projects from one land-block to another, not just across our own lands, but by aligning projects with National Parks and Reserves programmes, and collaboration with Conservation Groups working in neighbouring or nearby regions.

Policy Shift 4, pp. 37 and 39, recognises the need for 'socio-ecological systems' - acting collaboratively, in recognition of the interconnections beneath all living systems.

We strongly endorse this view, and are already working to build our own projects around it - but we also argue a concomitant need to acknowledge that healthy socio-ecological systems are **open systems.** We are, for instance, rapidly passing beyond the utility of fenced enclosures and 'sanctuaries' as biodiversity 'rescues.' Next-phase indigenous biodiversity work requires outreach, collaboration, and a sense of the many biodiversity 'flows' that amass into ecological networks - their human component included.

In building towards systems of flow, however, it is crucial that policy too shifts its values.

There is, within the policy document, still evidence of rigidity and outdated planning. For instance, pp. 39-40 move too quickly to comment on 'system governance.' While there has been a moment for heroic managerialism across modern societies, this is not that moment. It is more important now to find ways to assist on-the-ground groups to collaborate, rather than 'to manage' them - or the policy risks losing their willing participation.

It may also be timely to consider adding another, futures-oriented level to considerations: an outwards orientation.

Other than recognition of the emergence of the next Global Biodiversity policy in 2020, little is said of connection *beyond* New Zealand. Yet such issues as globalised economic systems, new trade tariff regimes and 'organic' product licensing, and especially climate change, mean that international connection will become more important.

We suggest a focus on the following:

1. maximising the use of information streaming and international links, to   adopt/adapt international ideas and best practice,

2. activating internationally-connected activities, such as:

   eco-tourism,
   international eco-study opportunities,
   AirBnB and B&B Eco-Aid programmes,
   on-line-streamed eco-interpretation information,
   mainstream media news-cycle interventions direct from local groups, to help achieve mass attitudinal change towards biodiversity values and practices,
   Public Holiday activities such as 'Waitangi Day Walks,'
   development of commercial products marketed by association with ikon species, with funding flows back to their conservation programmes.

To investigate these and other such possibilities, is precisely to 'mainstream' a pro-biodiversity 'social ecology' - and to gain more secure funding flows for conservation projects.

In this regard, the policy as proposed is, we feel, limited.

See for instance p 46, where old binaries are re-established: 'The tension between economic prosperity and biodiversity protection has not yet been resolved.'

Our experience suggests this is too pessimistic, and not forward-focused. Why not the phrase, 'biodiversity *prosperity?'* If biodiversity prospers, so do we - and so does the economy. Even when urging change, the current policy document lapses too often into conflict resolution discourse. We find, on the contrary, that on-the-ground businesses are already well beyond that, seeking out positive biodiversity projects and messages.

These experiences lead to a second, more major theme evident in the Policy:

2.0   Connectedness.

The Policy proposes an approach 'from the mountains to the sea' - a scope which especially suits us, since our lands reach up to 3,000 feet, and drop within the space of 12-15k to sea level. Water flows both above and beneath the ground on Takaka Hill, and contributes to nationally important spring systems.

Beyond this, is our sense of a natural space reaching into two National Parks, shot through with public pathways, with properties mostly unfenced, and connected below ground by cave systems so extensive as to not yet have been fully explored.

What has developed here is a keen sense of ecological - and geological - 'flows.' The Policy document on p. 51 calls for an 'integrated landscape approach,' and recognition of how 'ecological complexes' (p. 7) extend into the social.

Our experience has been that managing our lands on the Takaka Hill builds a principle of 'neighbourliness,' borne of long, multi-generational settlement, harsh living and working conditions, difficult karst terrain, and extreme weather.

Biodiversity for us therefore also rests on this social connectedness and collaboration, and we are interested in the recognition of this within the Policy document. Here at least, the Policy is moving forward, seeing a need to 'Shift' towards collaboration and integrated programmes, putting in place new techniques and ways to work.

There are several moments where this is apparent:

'Beyond protected areas... there are even fewer tools and frameworks available to ensure that biodiversity is protected' (p. 16.)

On p. 19, the Policy Document lists current techniques, including fenced sanctuaries, or spatial prioritisation - yet mentions how these initiatives are losing momentum. They are becoming too fragmented and competitive, built on old-school principles of exclusion, which fail to recognise the biological (and in our case, geological) imperatives of flow and inter-connectedness.

A similar issue arises for us, however, with the mention of possible biodiversity 'hubs' (p. 48; p. 32, which envisage 'a complete network of biodiversity hubs across New Zealand.')

These are ill-defined, and we advise caution, lest they represent a bureaucratic rather than a community vision. Unless evolving within a multi-connected system, they may raise another layer of hoops for biodiversity action-groups to jump through, and prove to be 'fund-guzzlers' in relation to conservation budgets. Creative programmes and the fast-response capacities of local communities can be slowed down by upwards/downwards negotiations, put in place with the best of 'integrationist' intentions. When, on p. 29, the Policy Document mentions 'in situ management,' and 'sustainable use,' it is more in line with the on-the-ground biodiversity action experience, on the back of which such 'hubs' will operate.

3.0 Communication, not Integration

For these reasons, we urge Policy planners to consider the need to make one further link in the chain of inter-connectedness: to recognise that communication systems supporting governance need to be built on the same 'connectedness' principles.

While in places the Policy document recognises this, there are other moments where 'old school' hierarchical values persist.

Communications today, especially as modeled by the dominant use of social media, has established a 'lateral' rather than 'top down' flow of information, as well as an immediacy of updating from otherwise sequestered experts.

Today, old hierarchical systems act as 'choke channels.' They slow progress, and in a community-engaged biodiversity plan, threaten to alienate commitment from what is and is likely to remain, a voluntary sector.

Pro-biodiversity workers on the ground can easily feel unheard, and their work disregarded. 'Engagement' of community, in a new social-ecology, means not marshaling all forces to march together, but to recognise diversity itself as the universal principle behind the work being planned and undertaken - and the universal reward that will accrue if we succeed.

We recommend careful attention to all the communication systems associated with this policy, not just at the level of communication hardware and apps., but recognising how information flow systems and decision making depend upon and are formed around the values contained within those communication systems.

Groups such as ours need:

> to have our local expertise, rapid responsiveness and self-starter responsibility recognised and supported.

we do not need to be 'managed', or incorporated into larger 'representative' bodies. **We can, and will, represent ourselves**.

useful forms of support include provision of wider-region meet-points, both real life (such as periodic forums to share experiences between groups) and online - such as regular expert update sites to which we can all subscribe for 'alerts'.

the capacity to sustain local on-the-ground connection with workers at both levels of Government, national and local, to feed in our observation data, or report irruptive concerns.

We support the 'data commons' construction of a national reporting site (p. 58).

We also urge recognition that groups such as ours can work creatively and pro-actively with our local industries, to promote project collaboration and share resources and information.

As the scope of what is proposed in New Zealand expands, and as factors such as climate change and global economic competition increase, every ounce of pro-biodiversity resourcing will be precious. We sense within this document that this urgency is real, and is recognised.

We therefore support the tendency towards sharing, through connection and collaboration, and away from competition or conflict.

Openness, not 'protective closure,' is the way forward.