



Takaka Hill Biodiversity Group Trust (THBGT)

Response to the Proposed Tasman BioStrategy Consultation Draft Available for Download [here](#)

1 Overall vision

THBGT supports and endorses the overall vision behind the proposed Bio-Strategy, and its embrace of Te Ao Maori principles and concepts.

As the BioStrategy document itself says, this is an aspirational vision.

It is unlikely that any pro-biodiversity community group is going to contest or dispute the vision, the decision to embrace Te Ao Maori values as its underpinning, or the recognition that iwi, all-of-community, industries and businesses, and all systems and levels of governance, need to be committed, and to help resource the programs that need to evolve.

There is however one segment of the Vision which causes us concern (see the section in italics).

Moemoeā - Vision

We rejoice as te Taiao, the natural world, is flourishing. It has been restored over large areas, including where people live. All native species thrive and ecosystems are resilient. Indigenous plants, birds, animals and forests are healthy, abundant, and managed sustainably. Future generations benefit from a healthy natural world supporting a healthy society and understand how to sustain this. *Te Tai o Aorere, Tasman, leads innovation in action and responsible human behaviour.* It acknowledges the interconnected relationship of the natural environment and the health and wellbeing of communities. Citizens, industries, and visitors know what makes the region special and are actively involved in sustaining and restoring nature.

We believe a weakness in the BioStrategy has been apparent from the beginning of the formation and discussion period, and that is its failure to consider a model to for its implementation: a model that can deliver the interconnections, localisation, 'social licence' and commitment that are required.

This is more than a significant omission: it is fundamental.

It is not enough to imply, as this document does, that the usual progression through vision, broader community agreement, to planning, organisational structure, and resourcing, will deliver the aspirational goals as concrete outcomes.

This is no simple 'regional project' plan. It is a comprehensive cultural change in how citizens live and work, and how they exist and collaborate within their environment.

Within such cultural change, *governance itself has to change* - and fundamentally.

There is no evidence in the proposed BioStrategy that change at that level, or in that way, is envisioned.

Instead, the three-stepped structuring of how communities are to become involved which is offered by the draft BioStrategy: 'Signatories,' 'Partners' and 'Allies,' remains patently hierarchical, while the units to be consulted and involved in resourcing and delivering The Vision remain siloed in old-school ways.

Within a strategy which seeks to foster very broad levels of community 'involvement,' and which is utterly dependent for implementation on participation, private resourcing and private land-access at unprecedented levels, something far more innovative and inspirational is going to be needed.

There is no indication within this document that such change is under way.

There are plenty of hopeful comments scattered through the document:

'This offers foundations for everyone to reconcile their cultures and their economies with environmental realities' (p. 6).

The '3 pillars' section speaks of: 'empowering action' (p. 8).

It says it will 'Create authentic space for collaboration/partnership – so communities have voice and ownership in areas important to them' (p. 11).

It assures us that 'The Tasman BioStrategy belongs to the community' (p. 14), and that by 2025 'Governance, regulations, and funding enable delivery of Bio-Strategy outcomes'.

It notes that it must ensure that 'sufficient resources are available to implement the BioStrategy' (p. 12), and projects that 'By 2025 programmes are in place to support landowners, businesses, resource users/owners and industry and, where appropriate, incentivized to contribute to protecting and restoring indigenous biodiversity as standard practice' (p. 12). There is no hint of what such incentives might be.

Above all, it envisions that 'By 2025 community action groups are resourced, growing, connected and coordinated and also have access to knowledge, expertise and information to actively manage biodiversity and other natural resources and act as environmental stewards' (p. 12).

The BioStrategy has, however, nothing at all to say about how such a rapid development will occur, and even more crucially, where the resources and systems of access are coming from.

2 Four short responses

2.1 Rohe: The sub-regional approach

The Strategy takes a fairly typical 'aerial' overview of Tasman, largely dictated by existing governance boundaries, crossed to some extent by terrain-types, and so possible project focus.

This does help 'localise' the issues, and will assist in local expertise input. It does however cut pockets of specialist terrain off from one another: karst country for instance is located in a number of rohe. More importantly, it works against, rather than for, the sorts of Te Ao holism for which it advocates. The 'mountains to the sea' approach isn't helped when the mountains are on one community's agenda, the sea on another. Nor does this sort of patchworking sit well with the ecological systems the BioStrategy sets out to restore and protect.

While this will likely remain a difficult issue in the formation of a 'local community' approach, it needs to be brought forward within the document as it stands now, so that the problems it implies can be addressed in the formation of the program - not emerging later, to bedevil any future successes.

2.2 'People-in-Place' as agents of change

A second issue involves the same remnants of centralised governance systems within the strategy design. This a program which promises 'community ownership,' but says, and so is likely to do, nothing about how a 'local community' could organise, get 'resourced' and become able to 'access expertise'.

Such communities are not somehow 'out there,' waiting to be activated. They need to be built, and in a program of such deep cultural change as this BioStrategy projects, developed and fostered over time.

This cannot be done from the centre, but only from the margins and the grass roots: from the very 'local' emphasis the document insists upon. This is not at core a program about systems of governance, but about 'disciplines of self': about local identity, and self-direction. It needs to develop and resource 'people in place' - those who live, work, and know on a day-to-day basis their rohe, and their people.

Such people exist in all communities - but they need the sort of program that central governance, intent upon its own day-to-day operationals, rarely recognises: that is, one which lets them prioritise and work on local issues, with local people, with a 'light demand' reporting and representational load upward. This way, they will achieve more, gain local community trust, and formulate

viable biodiversity projects. Fail to recognise the need for this local emphasis, and goodwill will evaporate - if indeed it ever develops.

2.3 'Finding the drivers'

As part of the local community emphasis, it is important to find 'the drivers': each local community's persons-in-place with the skills and energy to be one-point-of-contact daily communication agents, and with project management skills to keep multiple projects running on time and on budget.

Once again, such persons should not be 'parachuted in' from elsewhere - and especially not from within the system of governance. These skills can be developed from within the community, if not already available - and developed much faster with those of local environmental knowledge and generations-deep community awareness, which are central to successful local project work.

2.4 'Priming the pump'

The BioStrategy draft document speaks of resourcing community-level programs and projects - and within 2 years (by 2024) anticipates 'Action plans agreed and resourced.'

In a word, how?

Until the 'drive' in the middle is developed: the communication-with-all, and the generation of localised commitment by the formation of active groups ready to develop and carry out projects of protection and restoration, nothing will happen.

This process too requires resourcing. Local 'community activation' can be irruptive and form spontaneously - but sustaining it is always difficult. Only one national funding body: Lotteries, helps fund 'operational costs' for such groups, and at the moment their preferred focus categories specifically exclude environmental work. Unless the BioStrategy design has in mind some new way/s to support this phase of the program, it will fizzle and die quite quickly.

Given the rapidity of the projected deadlines, this phase must be formulated now, and communicated to local communities alongside the BioStrategy. The funding and resourcing model to make it all happen need to be central, not subsidiary and subsequent to it.

A way forward

As the sort of on-the-ground, hands-on pro-Biodiversity group whose work is centered on the BioStrategy goals, we have since 2018 been developing just such a program. Our Takaka Hill community of landowners, residents and industries, has already begun many of projects outlined as required in this document, and with some success.

Drawing on that experience, we offer an outline of one small way forward in developing this 'drive' for the BioStrategy.

We attach a short provisional document, and are happy to discuss it further with members of your team.