

Environment Policy

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand's environment is at the core of our quality of life, our national identity, and our competitive advantage, yet it is not being well managed.

Many of our streams, rivers, and lakes are deteriorating. Greenhouse gas emissions are soaring. Our forest estate is shrinking for the first time in decades. New leadership and direction are needed.

National's environment, conservation, and climate change policies take a distinctly 'Bluegreen' approach characterised by five important principles:

- Resource use must be based on sustainability.
- Economic growth and improving the environment can and must go hand in hand.
- Good science is essential to quality environmental decision-making.
- People respond best to change when engaged and given incentives.
- New Zealanders have a unique birthright to access and to enjoy our special places.

National's environmental priorities will be tackling climate change, furthering progress on fresh water issues, and effective nature conservation.

Note:

National has already released its [Outdoor Recreation Policy](#) and made previous statements about climate change, the Resource Management Act, and other important environmental issues. To see these statements please go to our webpage on [Environment](#).

National will be releasing further policies on environment issues, including water, before the 2008 election. For background information on our environment policy, please refer to [National's Bluegreen Discussion Paper](#).

ENVIRONMENT GOVERNANCE

Tackling environmental problems in New Zealand, especially through the operations of the Resource Management Act, has been synonymous with dispute and adversarial procedures. There is potential for considerable efficiency and improvements in environment performance by some activities being regulated nationally.

New Zealand's environmental management is being further compromised by the poor performance of the Environment Ministry. National wants to rebuild the Environment Ministry into a respected, politically neutral, well focused public service organisation that is capable of leading government policy advice on environmental challenges facing New Zealand. This will require a clarification of its roles and it not being involved in operational functions.

National's approach to environmental governance will be based on the following objectives:

- Fostering a sense of commitment to a shared national interest in sustainable development.
- Effectiveness in getting results.
- Long-term consistency.
- Reducing delay and cost.
- Better use of technical information.

National will:

- Invite stakeholders to work with us to reach agreement on up to 20 national environment goals to be achieved by specific dates, at the latest by 2030.
- Introduce a new Environmental Reporting Act requiring independent five-yearly State of the Environment Reports as a new function of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.
- Refocus the Ministry for the Environment into a politically neutral, highly skilled and respected policy adviser.
- Expand the existing Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA) into an Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) with increased responsibilities, including:
 - The national regulatory functions of the Resource Management Act, including 'Priority Consenting'.
 - Development of National Policy Statements and National Environmental Standards.
 - Its existing functions under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act.

CLIMATE CHANGE

National believes that New Zealand, as a responsible international citizen, and as a country that values our clean, green environment, must act to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

National will pursue sound, practical environment policies to achieve emission reduction. We want to reduce emissions in ways that result in the least cost to society and the economy.

National will:

- Set and legislate for an achievable emission reduction target for New Zealand – a 50% reduction in New Zealand's carbon-equivalent net emissions, as compared to 1990 levels, by 2050.
- Honour New Zealand's Kyoto Protocol obligations.
- Support international efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, including working to achieve further global alliances that build on the goals agreed at Kyoto.
- Legislate for a well-considered, carefully balanced emissions trading scheme (ETS) for efficiently reducing emissions across the economy (for more detail see Emissions Trading on the next page).
- Make it easier to invest in renewable energy by reforming the Resource Management Act.
- Boost investment in climate change research and development, particularly in the area of agriculture emissions.
- Empower consumers; ensure New Zealanders have access to the infrastructure, clear information, and meaningful incentives that encourage climate-friendly behaviour.

The Emissions Trading Scheme

National will pass legislation to amend Labour's Emissions Trading Scheme within nine months of taking office. We will ensure that a New Zealand ETS is introduced on 1 January 2010.

In amending the ETS we will be led by six key principles, summarised below.

National's principles:

1. The ETS must strike a balance between New Zealand's environmental and economic interests. It should not attempt to make New Zealand a world leader on climate change.
2. The ETS should be fiscally neutral rather than providing billions of dollars in windfall gains to the government accounts at the expense of businesses and consumers.
3. The ETS should be as closely aligned as possible to the planned Australian Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, with, where possible, common compliance regimes and tradability. National wants to closely co-operate with Australia as we develop our respective schemes.
4. The ETS should encourage the use of technologies that improve efficiency and reduce emissions intensity, rather than encourage an exodus of industries and their skilled staff to other countries.
5. The ETS needs to recognise the importance of small and medium enterprise to New Zealand and not discriminate against them in allocating emission permits.
6. The ETS should have the flexibility to respond to progress in international negotiations rather than setting a rigid schedule. This way, industry obligations can be kept in line with those of foreign competitors.

Incentivising New Technologies

New energy technologies will be required to help New Zealand make the transition to a low carbon economy and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

The current Government's policy is flawed in a number of areas:

- There are significant uncertainties about the cost and effectiveness of biofuels. Compulsory blend requirements begin before sustainability standards have been determined and these give huge tax advantages to ethanol over biodiesel.
- Our use of solar water heating is low compared to other countries. The number of new installations has declined due to excessive regulation.
- There is no support for electric vehicles. These are presently classified as diesels and subject to road user charges.

National favours an approach to biofuels and new energy technologies that focuses on incentives rather than compulsion.

To give these technologies a kick-start, National will exempt electric vehicles from road user charges. These incentives will be reviewed as the take-up increases and their use becomes widespread.

We will reinvigorate the solar water sector and encourage heat pump technologies for water heating where energy savings are comparable to solar.

1. Biofuels

National will:

- Dump the Government's Biofuels Bill.
- Apply a consistent tax incentive for sustainable biofuels, exempting ethanol and biodiesel from excise and road user charges in proportion to the blend (i.e. a 10% blend will get a 10% exemption).
- Develop a process for approving sustainable biofuels to gain tax exemption, taking into account net greenhouse gas emission reductions, impacts on biodiversity, and effects on food supply.

2. Solar and Heat Pump Hot Water Systems

National will:

- Provide a \$1,000 grant for new and existing households to install solar water systems.
- Remove the price regulation model in the current scheme, leaving homeowners to determine best value for money.
- Require open reporting on the performance of systems and a warranty system from manufacturers to ensure quality.
- Extend the grant scheme to include heat pump hot water technologies where energy performance is as good as it is from solar power.
- Remove the requirement to obtain a building consent. Regulate quality by requiring systems to be fitted by accredited installers.

3. Electric Cars

National will exempt electric cars from road user charges.

CONSERVATION

National supports the Department of Conservation as the lead agency for conserving New Zealand's unique native plants and animals, and we recognise its world leadership in species recovery and island restoration.

We believe the next step forward for conserving our unique flora and fauna is to encourage the initiatives of thousands of volunteers and dozens of organisations in community conservation projects. We must also remove disincentives to landowners seeking to improve their land management.

National also favours a more constructive role for the department in dealing with rural communities over conservation on private land. The department reverts too often to regulation when it could achieve more through consultation and engagement.

Ten of New Zealand's national parks are in the South Island and the remaining four are in the lower and eastern North Island. Yet 50% of the population lives north of Taupo. It is time to advance two new national parks in the north.

The magnificent Kauri forests of Northland rate as one of the natural wonders of the world. Tane Mahuta is a national treasure. These Kauri are taonga for local iwi, who must be included in the ongoing protection of these forests.

The Waitakere Ranges in Auckland are iconic. The prospect of these public lands becoming a new national park is worthy of proper investigation by the Department of Conservation.

National will:

- Reduce barriers to the participation of community organisations in species recovery programmes and make funding of community eco-restoration projects a priority.
- Develop a National Policy Statement under the Resource Management Act on biodiversity. This will provide clear direction to councils and the Department of Conservation on the balance between protecting indigenous biodiversity and the reasonable rights of property owners.
- Require the Department of Conservation to take a more consultative and engaging approach to landowners, and make greater use of QEII covenants, Nga Whenua Rahui and Landcare groups in advancing conservation on private land.
- Review the application of tax laws to clarify that nature conservation work by landowners such as fencing, native plantings, and pest control can be a deductible expense.
- Put greater effort into the control of pests and weeds, and increase the investment into new technologies to develop more efficient and safer pest control methods.
- Improve the accountability of the Department of Conservation by requiring specific nature conservation performance measures in the State of the Environment Reporting to be undertaken by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.
- Establish a new national park in Northland's Waipoua and surrounding Kauri forests.
- Initiate a formal investigation under the National Parks Act of a new national park on the public lands of the Waitakere Ranges.

ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

Healthy Air

New Zealand has been slow to act on its air pollution problems. After years of delay and several changes of policy, the Government has promulgated a national air quality standard, which requires healthy air to be achieved by 2013. Christchurch and a number of provincial cities and towns, especially throughout the South Island, do not currently meet this standard.

A national air quality standard, though welcome, is only the first step in solving this problem.

National will:

- Review progress on the National Environment Standard for air quality in 2010 to ensure we are on track to achieving compliance in 2013.
- Work with councils to provide financial assistance to help low income households change to clean heating and improve their insulation.
- Progressively introduce more sophisticated emissions standards and testing for vehicles.
- Ensure imported vehicle emission standards keep up with international best practise in emission technologies.

Noise

Excessive noise is a form of pollution. It is regulated reasonably successfully by councils under the Resource Management Act. However, vehicles do not require a resource consent and their noise is causing considerable angst all over New Zealand.

While other countries have been tightening the standard as new technology becomes available, New Zealand's standard has not been revised in more than 20 years.

National will

- Amend New Zealand traffic regulations to bring standards for new cars in line with latest European and Australian noise limits.
- Include noise checks of vehicle exhaust systems as part of warrant of fitness tests.

Solid Waste

Recycling has caught on in most parts of New Zealand, with some communities finding they have been able to reduce waste going to landfill by more than 60 percent.

National wants to ensure there are adequate incentives to encourage widespread waste reduction and safe waste disposal. We also support increased producer responsibility. We want to encourage industries to design products that can be recycled and for them to play an active role, where practical, in their collecting and re-use.

The Government has withdrawn funding for Keep New Zealand Beautiful and, as a result, the Clean Up New Zealand Week will struggle to motivate New Zealanders to take responsibility for a tidier community. National supports such initiatives and will invest in this community programme.

National will:

- Implement a national environment standard for landfills and phase out the use of non-complying landfills.
- Implement the new Waste Minimisation Act with local government and industry so as to ensure it does not cut across existing successful waste programmes.
- Work with community and business organisations to support Keep New Zealand Beautiful and the Clean Up New Zealand Week.