

**CASE STUDY: INCENTIVE MEASURES  
PROTECTION OF NATURAL HERITAGE ON PRIVATE LAND**

**Submitted by the Government of New Zealand**

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### **Background**

New Zealand has a land title system which provides strong, legally guaranteed property rights over land for private (and public) landowners. Those rights extend to all resources on or in the land except water, geothermal energy, most minerals, and most wildlife, which are government owned.

Natural heritage on private land has been subject to significant destruction or degradation, by deliberate and accidental effects. Almost all agriculture, forestry and horticulture (which form the most significant element of the NZ economy) are based around introduced fauna and flora. Aside from tourism and fisheries, indigenous biodiversity does not provide a significant direct contribution to the economy. There has therefore been extensive clearance of natural ecosystems. In addition, NZ is an island nation, the biodiversity of which developed in the absence of terrestrial mammals (other than bats), and alien species are a major threat to the remnants which have been protected within reserves or which remain on private land.

The Government has developed a three-pronged approach to protection of nature on private land:

1. continue to purchase areas for addition to the central and local government protected area network (often in response to a request from a landowner wishing to see the area protected, and sometimes at below market rate because the landowner wishes to facilitate the purchase);
2. impose regulatory controls (e.g. the deliberate killing of almost all birds, all reptiles and amphibians, bats, and some invertebrates is prohibited, and land use planning legislation allows local government to control a range of land uses including vegetation clearance and wetland draining); and
3. encourage and empower landowners to voluntarily protect and manage indigenous biodiversity on their land.

This case study focuses on the third approach.

### **Incentives**

A wide range of incentives operate to influence landowners decisions and behaviour. The following are the most important.

#### *Providing Information on Indigenous Biodiversity*

Landowners are more likely to protect indigenous biodiversity if they understand its significance, the relative significance of the values on their land, and the potential threats to those values. Government agencies, community groups and professional groups all contribute to this understanding.

#### Examples:

- The Government operates a survey programme to identify the best remaining remnants of indigenous vegetation. The results are made available to landowners. In one recent case, the survey of an ecological district resulted in the identification of 54 areas recommended for protection. Since this was completed and the results provided to landowners, 7 areas have been voluntarily protected through covenants (see below), 3 areas are in the process of being covenanted, and 28 other property owners have expressed a positive response to the information they received.
- Professional and conservation groups identify and promote the protection of rare species habitats and ecosystems. For example, it is estimated that at least 5% of New Zealanders belong to conservation organisations, and these provide considerable information to members and landowners, as well as providing significant "moral pressure".
- Conservation groups and commercial publishers have published numerous books on indigenous biodiversity and conservation issues.
- Public television has filmed and televised nature conservation programmes.
- The Government is running public education campaigns to increase understanding of nature and threats to it. For example sponsorship money from a major corporate organisation is paying for an information campaign to explain to landowners the threats to kiwi. The kiwi is a rare, flightless bird which is threatened with extinction on the mainland, largely by habitat clearance, dogs and mustelids. The campaign involves both information dissemination and visits to individual landowners to explain the importance of the kiwi populations on their land. (See attached material.)
- Landcare groups are being established by and for farmers, to encourage the adoption of sustainable farming practices.

#### *Empowering Legal Protection*

A number of legal mechanisms have been enacted to allow landowners to ensure the permanent protection of indigenous vegetation and habitats on their land. These legal covenants are signed between the landowner and either the Department of Conservation (a central government department), a local authority, or the Queen Elizabeth the Second National Trust (a central government supported trust), and are then registered on the land title. They can only be revoked by mutual agreement of both parties. The important value of these covenants is that landowners can be sure that a change in ownership of the land (in the event of sale or the death of the owner) will not remove the protection. There is a special type of covenant for Maori land.

- There are over 1000 covenants in place, protecting over 100,000 hectares of land. There are around 100 new applications a year, although implementation is limited by funding availability for the costs. (See attached information.)

### *Financially Supporting Protection and Management*

The Government and the public often provide some direct assistance to the landowner to help cover the costs of protection and management. Local and central government may contribute to the costs of weed and pest control. Community organisations frequently assist with revegetation.

Examples:

- Contributions of QEII to covenants include 50% of the fencing costs that the owner would face, and all survey costs for registration (see attached information). A similar approach is taken by the Department of Conservation.
- A Department of Conservation programme called Tu Kakariki provides a focus for work with the community related to trees and revegetation. As part of this, Arbor Day provides a focus for annual community tree planting programmes (e.g. around 25,000 trees planted in 1995) and the MacDonalDs' sponsored tree planting programme focuses on plantings by school children (15,000 trees per annum).
- Income from duck stamps on sports fishing licences are used to fund wetland creation and rehabilitation programmes, including on private land.

### *Community Groups as Landowners*

Many community groups also purchase land specifically for conservation. These lands will generally be protected by covenant or other legal means (e.g. as a reserve). The group will then undertake active management to maintain and enhance the values on the land, to provide public access and to educate visitors.

Examples:

- The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society own 35 areas covering around 1400 hectares of land
- The New Zealand Native Forest Restoration Trust is a relatively new national organisation established to purchase areas of degraded forest or scrub, and undertake active restoration. Funding is by public donation. A number of areas have been purchased and are being actively restored, and a full time staff person is undertaking species recovery work on a rare bird in one reserve.

### *Providing Information and Training in Management Techniques*

Because conservation in New Zealand requires active management of pests and weeds, not just legal protection of land areas, landowners often need assistance to develop and implement the necessary management programmes.

Examples:

- The Department of Conservation is a world leader in many management techniques, notably the control of predators and browsing animals. Those techniques are made available for private landowners to use, and Departmental staff may provide active assistance to transfer those skills.
- There has also been development of techniques and equipment by the private sector and community groups (e.g. traps for possums, predator proof fencing).
- Manuals and brochures on management (e.g. revegetation, riparian management) have been issued by the QEII National Trust, Department of Conservation, local authorities, and conservation groups.
- Landcare groups and publicly funded researchers have been developing best practice techniques for sustainable land management.

### *Removing Perverse Incentives*

The Government has undertaken a number of economic reforms which have directly or indirectly removed perverse incentives encouraging destruction of biodiversity.

Examples:

- Subsidies for land clearance and farm production have been removed.
- Local government funding is generally provided through rates, and various rating provisions have reduced the rating burden on protected land which is not providing an income to the owner.

### **Results**

While the area of private protected land is small compared to the public protected area network, there are significant nature conservation values on private land. Private land often contains the last remnants of certain ecosystem types (e.g. those which were present on fertile lowland sites) which are poorly represented in the protected area network, significant wildlife populations, and the most accessible or visible areas close to urban populations. Increasingly, these areas are being provided with legal protection and active management by landowners and the local community.

### **Conclusions**

While economic incentives are important in determining landowner behaviour, the New Zealand experience suggests that landowner understanding and attitude is at least as important, or more important. A wide range of mechanisms are operating to increase landowner interest in nature conservation, and to ensure that when landowners wish to contribute to nature conservation they have access to the necessary legal provisions, technical assistance, and financial assistance to enable them to act.