



Speeches (/speeches)

(Parker, D., 2023b)

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24 MARCH 2023

Notes of an address to the Environmental Defence Society Conference, Auckland



HON DAVID PARKER(/MINISTER/HON-DAVID-PARKER)

Environment (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/environment)

Tēnā koutou katoa.

Can I begin by thanking Gary Taylor, Raewyn Peart and others in the EDS team for their herculean work in support of the environment.

I'd also like to acknowledge Hon Simon Upton, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, my parliamentary colleagues, and the many activists here who strive for better outcomes.

I endorse the view expressed by Kayla Kingdon-Bebb of WWF last night. If New Zealand with all our advantages – enormous natural capital in forests, fisheries, soils, water, abundant renewable energy – can't achieve better environmental outcomes, no-one can.

The list goes on. Democracy, the rule of law, a successful economy, financial wealth, low population density, a strong environmental ethic born of the fusion of Māori and settler values.

Of course, we have some disadvantages on the biodiversity front. If there was a grand designer of our birds, he/she/it/they missed a few tricks, and the dietary preferences of stoats, rats and possums.

We know from our own experience that the OECD is correct in saying that environmental protection relies upon laws to stop human practice going too far.

Whether it's carbon pollution, the logging of indigenous forests, nutrient and sediment pollution, or ever-increasing quantities of packaging and waste, rules are needed to stop the excesses.

A sophisticated mix of regulation, education and economic signals is often needed.

Many believe that the failure of the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) to live up to its promise lay in the absence of the national policy statements, environmental standards, section 360 regulations, and price signals needed for any environmental system to work.

So today, I'm going to list what we have achieved over the last 5 ½ years to fill those holes.

5th

on year, so I hope you will allow me the occasional political contrast, because actions do speak louder than

You may also have seen recent news about Government working with insurance companies to urgently identify where we should not rebuild or, if we do, how to minimise future climate hazard risks.

In 2022, the Government published its first National Adaptation Plan (NAP) setting out New Zealand's long-term strategy for responding to, and minimising, climate change risks.

Local government wants help to use consistent processes to identify and assess the level of threat from natural hazards, including how those hazards may become more dangerous due to climate change.

This is needed both under the RMA and in the new system.

Restricting development in areas at risk from natural hazards is a difficult issue. While councils can technically restrict development in areas subject to high natural hazard and climate change risk, councils such as Christchurch and Kāpiti Coast have faced strong opposition from local communities and landowners, including legal challenges, when trying to address these issues.

The impact of cyclones Hale and Gabrielle on recently-developed areas has raised questions about why development was allowed, or whether improved stormwater infrastructure could have lessened the impacts.

Update on RM Reform

P Now I want to turn to the Spatial Planning Bill (SP Bill) and Natural and Built Environment Bill (NBE Bill) and the development of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

The resource management reforms are on track.

There is broad support for them.

There is overwhelming support for reducing the number of RMA plans from over 100 to 15, which will be more consistent and of better quality. This necessitates regional planning committees. These allow council and other groups in each region to pool resources, with provisions embedded to ensure that local voices are heard.

Fewer, better plans will enable better outcomes and cost savings. More powers in respect of permitted activities will also reduce the number of resource consents required.

P We intend to pass both Bills before the election. MfE is well resourced to assist the select committee (the Environment Committee) to land the legislation in a good place.

Many years of work preceded the launch of the reforms, including the extensive efforts of EDS with the Property Council, Infrastructure NZ, and the Northern EMA. Others like the Waitangi Tribunal and LGNZ did their own reports. Then we had the recommendations of the Randerson Panel, which consulted widely. Then a select committee inquiry on core provisions. And an efficiency review by independent experts, plus the current select committee process.

It's time to finish the job and drive it through.

Everyone is now working hard to further improve the Bills based on the very detailed and thorough submissions we have received.

We continue to put a lot of time into Part 1 of the NBE Bill and the many submissions received on this.

We remain focused on ensuring a sustainable natural environment is put first, but alongside that an efficient and effective planning and consenting system for development enabled within limits and targets.

The current money wasted on consenting infrastructure is unconscionable and undermines public support for much needed environmental protection. The New Zealand Infrastructure Commission, Te Waihanga is also developing standards for common development activities, to reduce the need for bespoke consent conditions.

The purpose clause works with limits and targets, given expression via the NPF.

We are granting exemptions to the 10 year limit for renewals for hydro generators, because climate change makes it clear we need that hydro.

Te Waihanga is leading the infrastructure chapter in the first NPF. The new resource management system will better enable the provision of infrastructure to address the current infrastructure deficit and support our population. It will also contribute to reducing climate emissions, improve natural environmental impacts.

Rolling out the new system

P Transitioning to the new system will start immediately but take up to 10 years to complete. A staged approach will see some regions begin developing their regional spatial strategy soon after the legislation is enacted, followed by a second group of regions. MfE is working with regional partners to identify the first regions.

Funding was provided in Budget 2022 for the delivery of the resource management changes, including support for the first group of regions to develop regional spatial strategies and NBE plans. Officials are also exploring ways to manage capacity across the resource management system during the transition.

MfE will work alongside this first group of regions, providing guidance, funding, and support to establish regional planning committees and develop their strategies and plans in the new system. Key to this will be agreement on how treaty settlements and existing resource management agreements will be upheld equivalent to how they are under the RMA; and working with Māori interests, including post-settlement governance entities, and councils to demonstrate how the new system works.

Conclusion

Q As I have said often, the RMA costs too much, takes too long and has neither adequately protected the environment nor allowed necessary development of housing or infrastructure.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to fix this crucial environmental law. We need to fix it and we are.

I know some people are calling for delay. There will always be people of that view. They are wrong. I've laid out the long history. It's time to finish the job.

Lastly, can I put in a plug for national direction on estuaries. They need biological indicators. An estuary with healthy flounder needs crabs that feed on shellfish, which can't endure excessive sediment.

Thank you for your time.

Ngā mihi.



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