



Inquiry into whether government should restrict or permit private business profiting from conservation activities

Recommendation

The report of the Local Government and Environment Committee makes the following recommendations to the Government

- That private business should be permitted to operate on conservation land.
- That, although no additional restrictions should be applied to the concession process, that process should be reviewed and updated if required.
- That eco-tourism should be strongly promoted.

Introduction

New Zealand's natural and historic heritage is currently managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC) which was established under the Conservation Act 1987. The department's current approach is to encourage outdoor participation and recreation on conservation land and it is actively building infrastructure to support demand. Currently, a concession is required to run any commercial activity on an area managed by the department. During 2011/12 651 applications were received with 67 percent being approved. The department also oversees all of New Zealand's land area in order to help maintain a healthy environment and to protect natural resources.

Biodiversity and business

We were advised by the department that New Zealand's biodiversity is unique with 90 percent of birds, 80 percent of plants, and all reptiles, frogs, and bats endemic to New Zealand, and it is important that this uniqueness is maintained and that business input currently assists with this.

The department is involved with partner organisations in a number of projects such as the Air New Zealand Great Walks Biodiversity Project and the Genesis Energy Whio Recovery Programme, which help to maintain our biodiversity. For example, the project with Air New Zealand has seen the release of 10 kiwi and 50 threatened robins onto the Rakiura Track, and the release of 70 pāteke (brown teal) on the Milford Track. The recovery programme with Genesis Energy has been ensuring viable duck populations on eight sites around the country.

Pest management

New Zealand has one of the highest proportions of threatened species and one of the highest extinction rates of species in the world, and we were advised that pests such as rats, possums, and stoats were major threats. Current pest eradication practise consists mainly of poisoning and trapping, however the department has recently set up a Biodiversity Forum to begin work on achieving a predator-free New Zealand. Its role is to enlist the support of stakeholders and use best science and innovation to prove feasibility and to actively co-ordinate with non-governmental conservation organisations.

Current restrictions

The department's process for granting permits and concessions for businesses to operate on conservation land varies according to the situation. An environmental impact assessment is usually carried out for all concession applications and consultation with the public, tangata whenua, and trust boards are usually required. Conditions can be applied to minimise environmental impacts and to promote safety. On-going environmental research and monitoring can also be a condition for consent.

For a concession to be granted it must comply with the purpose for which the land is held under the Conservation Act 1987, the Reserves Act 1977, or the National Parks Act 1980 and must not be inconsistent with existing statutory plans. We are concerned that these restrictions could now be outdated and in need of modernisation.

Review of Restrictions

We all agree that businesses which damage the environment should pay taxes proportionately. We were unable to agree on the issue of whether or not businesses that benefit from but do not harm conservation should receive a penalty.

Mining

Currently, the process for obtaining permission to mine on conservation land is robust and involves seeking a permit from the Minister of Energy. The Minister of Conservation must agree access and resource consent must be obtained under the Resource Management Act 1991. While we were persuaded that mining projects can bring considerable value to local communities, we were concerned that major environmental damage can occur through mining projects on conservation land and that new consents for mining projects should be rigorously examined.

Eco-Tourism

We believe that eco-tourism should be better promoted to private businesses in New Zealand and consumers. Tourist activities such as tramping or mountain biking should be coupled with a conservation activity such as planting trees or setting traps to help reduce

predator numbers. We were advised that there are already conservation groups that conduct “eco” activities which provide an input to the environment and we agreed that these should be encouraged.

Conclusions

We recommend that the Government should not place additional restrictions on businesses profiting from conservation activities, but that neither should there be any relaxation of current legislation which we believe to be robust. We recommend that the status quo be maintained and that the current restrictions placed on commercial activity on conservation land be reviewed by the government and updated if required.

We recommend that the Government should further investigate the promotion of the eco-tourism industry to help negate environmental impacts caused by businesses operating on land in New Zealand.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The committee met on 16 and 17 July 2013 to consider the inquiry. The committee received and heard two submissions. Evidence was heard from the Department of Conservation and the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and advice was received from the Ministry of Youth Development

Committee members

Melania Napa'a (Chairperson)
Calum Gray
Ethan Hill
Annie Huang
Injy Johnstone
Kristina Kim
Callum Lo
Georgina Lomax-Sawyers
Holly McNabb
George Moon
Jack Stringer
Bridget White