

Cabinet has agreed that conservation will remain the primary purpose of the Conservation Act

- Per Cabinet agreement in September last year, the intention of the proposed reform is to further enable economic development on conservation land, while retaining conservation as the primary purpose of the Conservation Act [CAB-25-MIN-0334.01].

There are fast pathways for economic projects to get approval to operate on conservation land

- Economic activities already occur on conservation land, and major economic activities have fast pathways for authorisation. The pathway they take depends on their nature and scale:
 - **The Fast-track Approvals Act 2024** provides a pathway for economically significant activities to seek a range of approvals through a single application.
 - Mining is primarily regulated under the **Crown Minerals Act 1991** rather than the Conservation Act. DOC typically approves the mining applications it processes under that Act.
 - From November 2024 – October 2025, DOC processed 120 applications under the Crown Minerals Act to access PCL for mining-related activities. Of these, 90% were approved; 1.7% were declined; 6.7% were withdrawn; and 1.7% were returned
 - Most remaining activities on conservation land need a concession. The **concessions process is set out in the Conservation Act**, but it is referred to and used under other conservation legislation (e.g. the National Parks Act and Reserves Act).

DOC approves the vast majority of applications to use conservation land

- Under the status quo, DOC approves the vast majority of concession applications to use conservation land for economic development.
 - Out of 2,810 concession applications that DOC considered between January 2025 – October 2025, only 2% (50) were declined.

The proposed reforms will enable more economic development

- The Bill will ensure DOC processes concessions faster and more efficiently while enabling more economic development on conservation land:
 - Under the proposed new National Conservation Policy Statement (**NCPS**), certain activities will be exempt from needing a concession, or “pre-approved” (i.e. you will be able to go online to purchase your concession instantaneously).
 - Exemptions and pre-approvals will give potential operators more certainty and mean that economic activities can get underway faster.

- 20 activities are proposed to be exempt from needing a concession or will be ‘pre-approved’. This includes activities like guiding, some types of commercial transport, and some types of filming.
- The proposed exemptions and pre-approvals will remove an estimated 30-40% of applications from the standard concessions processing pipeline.
- Activities in these categories will be able to proceed without an individualised DOC assessment.
- Under the proposed NCPS, major economic activities will be ‘pre-assessed’ in advance of anyone putting in an application. This will give potential operators clarity about where key economic activities are more likely to be approved on conservation land.
 - 26 moderately sized and economically significant activities are proposed for “pre-assessment”. This includes infrastructure like tourism facilities, water supply schemes, roads, and hydroelectric facilities.
 - If activities have a ‘green’ pre-assessment, potential operators will know where an activity is more likely to be appropriate, so can design proposals so they can more easily be approved.
 - All but one pre-assessed activity is green-lit in over 50% of PCL. Many activities are green-lit in 87-95% of PCL.
- The Bill also simplifies the structure of statutory planning documents and removes unnecessary rules and limits that concessions must currently be consistent with. This includes limits on numbers of concessionaires or groups sizes.
 - Removing unnecessary rules will encourage operators who are currently hesitant to apply for concessions.

Amendments to the purpose-related provisions of the Conservation Act will support economic development on conservation land

- The amendments to the purpose-related provisions of the Conservation Act, as proposed, will:
 - support the economic development enabled throughout the Bill, including ensuring that the s9(2)(h) [REDACTED], and
 - enable some concessions to be approved that previously would have been declined.

The Bill will provide for the National Conservation Policy Statement to enable economic development.

- The proposed purpose-related amendments will support the implementation of the NCPS by more clearly signalling the intent to facilitate economic development on public conservation land, s9(2)(h) [REDACTED]

- §9(2)(h)

There are other options for amending the purpose-related provisions of the Conservation Act, but these introduce risk

- If Cabinet wishes to create an even stronger signal about enabling more economic development on conservation land, this can be achieved by removing current drafting in purpose-related provisions related to the requirement to not be inconsistent with conservation. This would be replaced with wording that makes it clear decision-makers are to enable use and development to the greatest extent practicable under the Act.
- This option maintains the policy intent of retaining conservation as the primary purpose and goes as far as possible to create a clear and certain signal in favour of economic development. This §9(2)(h) and may enable some additional concessions to be approved that might otherwise have been declined.

A rebalancing of conservation and economic development can be achieved through further reform

- If Ministers are seeking significantly more economic development on conservation land, it is possible, however it requires a fundamental redesign of the conservation system.
§9(2)(f)(iv)
- This is because the conservation purpose of the conservation system is deeply embedded through all conservation legislation.
 - §9(2)(h)
 - §9(2)(h)
- For the purposes of this reform package, I have considered and discounted options that look to insert balancing provisions into the current Conservation Act. §9(2)(h)
- §9(2)(h)

- s9(2)(h)
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

The Minister may wish to observe:

These reforms make worthwhile changes within the current restrictions of Conservation legislation. They:

- Allow for easier land exchange
- Reform the complicated planning system and greenlight certain activities
- Promote more activities on conservation land by providing exemptions and preapprovals
- Put the acid on DOC by creating statutory timeframes for processing applications
- Within the constraints the cabinet agreed they are gains that are worthwhile taking

s9(2)(f)(iv), s9(2)(g)(i)
[Redacted]
[Redacted]