

# Lessons learnt from the 2000 New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy



Department of  
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*Te Papa Atawhai*

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### Purpose and context

The purpose of this report is to summarise key strengths and weaknesses of the 2000 New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

In 2018, the Minister of Conservation directed DOC to begin the development of a new national biodiversity strategy on behalf of all New Zealanders.

DOC sought an open discussion with Treaty partners, stakeholders and the New Zealand public on their views, aspirations and roles in protecting and restoring nature. A discussion document (Te Koiora o te Koiora) was published in August 2019 and public consultation was invited.

Discussions and submissions often included insights about the 2000 NZBS, both in terms of its positive aspects and its shortcomings. A key focus during development of the new biodiversity strategy was ensuring that the lessons learnt from the 2000 NZBS were informing the new strategy.

Te Mana o te Taiao, the new Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, was released in August 2020.

This summary is based on the key reports 'Turning the Tide? A Review of the First Five Years of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy, The Synthesis Report' (Wren Green and Bruce Clarkson, 2005) and 'Addressing New Zealand's Biodiversity Challenge – a Regional Council thinkpiece' (2017), as well as several other reports and publications (see appendix for references).

Conclusions have also been drawn from submissions to the Department of Conservation (DOC) on the 2018 Discussion Document 'Te Koiora o te Koiora: Proposals for a biodiversity strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand'. A full summary of submissions is available [here].

Note that this paper does not review progress in implementing the strategy's outcomes and goals.

### Background on the 2000 New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy

The release of the first New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (NZBS) in 2000 marked an important milestone for biodiversity conservation and management in New Zealand. Responding to commitments made under the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), the NZBS established a framework for action to halt the decline of indigenous biodiversity.

#### Purpose, scope and key issues

The purpose and scope of the NZBS was described as follows:

*The purpose of the Strategy is to establish a strategic framework for action, to conserve and sustainably use and manage New Zealand's biodiversity. The primary focus is on New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity. However, because of the value and economic importance of much of our introduced biodiversity, the conservation of the genetic resources of our important introduced species is also addressed.*

The NZBS was overseen by DOC. Its implementation was a collaborative effort shared over seven government agencies (as named in 2000): Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, Te Puni Kokiri, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The NZBS identified a number of issues or barriers to the effective management of biodiversity. These included issues around information, knowledge, resources and capacity and the need for:

- A complete scientific knowledge about the state of biodiversity,
- Effective tools to classify and map different types of ecosystems,
- Consistent methods for monitoring the changes in biodiversity, barriers to information sharing,
- Resources and capacity for the management of resources and biodiversity issues, and
- Valuation methods to determine the true value of biodiversity and enable the development of incentives for biodiversity management.

A key challenge identified was the maintenance of biodiversity values outside public protected areas. The NZBS emphasised the role of central and local government, communities and private landowners in achieving biodiversity outcomes on public and private land.

## Goals and strategy framework

The NZBS set out four overarching goals at the national level.

### *Goal 1: Community and individual action, responsibility and benefits*

Enhance community and individual understanding about biodiversity, and inform, motivate and support widespread and coordinated community action to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity; and

Enable communities and individuals to equitably share responsibility for, and benefits from, conserving and sustainably using New Zealand's biodiversity, including the benefits from the use of indigenous genetic resources.

### *Goal 2: Treaty of Waitangi*

Actively protect iwi and hapu interests in indigenous biodiversity, and build and strengthen partnerships between government agencies and iwi and hapu in conserving and sustainably using indigenous biodiversity.

### *Goal 3: Halt the decline in New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity*

Maintain and restore a full range of remaining natural habitats and ecosystems<sup>15</sup> to a healthy functioning state, enhance critically scarce habitats, and sustain the more modified ecosystems in production and urban environments; and do what else is necessary to maintain and restore viable populations of all indigenous species and subspecies across their natural range and maintain their genetic diversity.

### *Goal 4: Genetic resources of introduced species*

Maintain the genetic resources of introduced species that are important for economic, biological and cultural reasons by conserving their genetic diversity.

Objectives and actions to achieve to goals were grouped into ten themes: biodiversity on land, freshwater biodiversity, coastal and marine biodiversity, conservation and use of genetic resources, biosecurity and biodiversity, governance, Māori and biodiversity, community participation and awareness, information, knowledge and capacity, and New Zealand's international responsibilities.

In total 147 actions were outlined, 43 of which were priority actions (seen as vital to achieve within the first five years). For each action, the Government leads and key players who would be involved in management decisions, funding and/or implementation are identified. Funding was provided for some priority actions, but not for full implementation of the strategy.

### Reviews and progress

The NZBS stated that a review would be carried out after five years to consider its effectiveness and identify any changes that needed to be made. This independent review was carried out by Wren Green and Bruce Clarkson in 2005.

In 2016, an updated New Zealand Biodiversity Action Plan 2016 – 2020 was released. This update set new national targets toward greater protection and sustainable use of biodiversity. They aligned with the five strategic goals of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2010–2020 and the related Aichi targets.

During the lifecycle of the NZBS, New Zealand has submitted six National Reports to the CBD to outline progress made towards the strategy's targets.

### Strengths of the NZBS

Overall, the NZBS was seen to play an important role in the biodiversity management system. It gave meaning and created a framework for all other biodiversity related work. Developed by DOC over four years, with extensive consultation with government agencies, communities and Treaty Partners, the NZBS received widespread support and attention following its release in 2000.

#### Positive response to the NZBS framework

The vision statement, outcomes and goals of the NZBS were generally seen as sound by many involved in the biodiversity system.

Green and Clarkson highlighted the following as successes of the NZBS:

It articulated a coherent vision for New Zealand's unique biodiversity that had widespread support.

- It sought to be inclusive of central and local government in delivering results by working in partnerships between agencies, businesses, community groups and landowners.
- It set priorities, identified key players and assigned lead responsibilities for each action.
- It identified the need for an integrated response in order to be successful. E.g. better knowledge to underpin management, more coordination between agencies, widespread and informed community action, and market-driven rewards and sanctions.

#### Partnerships

The NZBS was said to have brought about many partnerships between government, iwi, community and industry and contributed to a rise in community conservation.

Community conservation has grown significantly since the release of the NZBS. Community restoration groups, backyard trappers, coastal and marine protection advocates and the sanctuary movement have changed the face of biodiversity management. There has also been an increase in philanthropic funding and increased awareness and contribution from business and industry.

### Cultural changes

As part of the consultation on Te Koiroa o te Koiroa in 2019, hui participants discussed how biodiversity as a concept has changed over time. In 2000, biodiversity was poorly understood, and belonged to the scientific community. In recent years this has changed, with the term now more connected to whakapapa/whanaungatanga in a te ao Māori perspective. The nature–people connection of biodiversity is more widely understood, and it's seen less as a sanctuary/preservation view and more that biodiversity exists in the landscape of people.

### Initial funding and support

The targeted funding support that accompanied the NZBS was seen as critical to its initial success. Over a five-year period, \$187 million in new funding was allocated to government agencies, landowner and community activities to implement the NZBS.

The NZBS set aside \$35million for protecting biodiversity on private land over 5 years. This budget allocation recognised the expanded role of a wider range of public agencies in private land protection.

### Positive biodiversity outcomes

Green and Clarkson identified a number of areas where the targeted funding from the NZBS helped to 'turn the tide' of biodiversity losses or threats:

- Substantial gains on private lands through the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust, Nga Whenua Rahui and Nature Heritage Fund
- Success of "Weedbusters" strategy in significantly extending priority areas under management for weeds
- Gains for biodiversity following rodent eradication on several off-shore islands
- Intensive management in mainland islands and sanctuaries, e.g. for kiwi
- Addition of more marine reserves and significant expansion of the area protected
- More strategies and plans for protecting threatened terrestrial and marine species
- Reduction of seabirds caught as 'bycatch' in fishing operations
- International progress on reducing ballast water threats
- Major rise in community biodiversity projects with an increasing involvement by regional and district councils

New Zealand's most recent National Report to the CBD, covering the period 2014 – 2018, stated that New Zealand had made good progress in several areas. There had been improvements to how biodiversity was integrated into planning processes, an increased area of private land protected under covenant. There was also increased awareness of biodiversity, increased numbers of people taking action for nature, and improved understanding of climate change impacts on biodiversity.

However, the report made it clear that more work needed to be done and confirmed the huge challenge of conserving indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems in New Zealand.

## Weaknesses of the NZBS

Despite the progress made under the NZBS, New Zealand's indigenous biodiversity is still in decline [Link to Biodiversity in Aotearoa report]. Reviews and experiences have identified a number of key areas where the NZBS could have been strengthened, and which a new strategy should address.

### Funding mechanisms

Much of the widespread interest, attention and success of the NZBS in its first few years was attributed to the targeted funding that came with its release. In 2006 the Government decided to baseline further funding within relevant government agency funding allocations. When funding became baselined, and then reduced, this greatly affected the implementation of the NZBS - once it became incorporated into agency baselines, there was no system to ensure it would continue to be used for the priority actions, and that other agency funding would also be spent on biodiversity work.

### Status as a strategy owned and implemented by all of New Zealand

The NZBS was written as a strategy for all of New Zealand. On its release a significant amount of the funding was allocated to DOC to strengthen existing programmes, leading to a perception that the NZBS was largely 'DOC's strategy'. This was particularly felt by local government. Green and Clarkson noted that a lack of engagement between levels of government also likely contributed to this perception. The governance systems for strategy implementation did not last and were unable to ensure that an ongoing whole-of-government implementation was maintained and visible.

Many people also commented that the NZBS was a considerably lengthy and technical document, which may have made it less accessible to members of the general public with an interest in biodiversity.

### Implementation of policy

Many players in the biodiversity system agree that although the outcomes and goals of the NZBS were sound, the implementation of actions was largely slow and ineffective. A key failure identified was that the many existing international agreements, national policies and statutes relating to biodiversity management were not integrated and implemented in a strategic and coordinated way.

Issues around accountability and responsibilities, prioritisation, monitoring and review all contributed to a lack of progress of implementation.

### Accountability and responsibilities

A common issue identified with the NZBS was the lack of clear accountability for implementation of the goals and actions. It was often unclear what the goals meant in practice, as well as the roles of different players to achieve them. Despite most actions having a clear lead agency, some Not all actions had a clear lead, and lead agencies did not necessarily see the actions as more than "nice to do" ideas. Familiarity with the strategy and accountability for actions also appeared to be fading as early as 2005.

Green and Clarkson identified that issues of cross-government coordination and the need for stronger leadership to deliver partnerships were crucial to the success of the NZBS, but had not been addressed in its first five years. Lack of coordination across the biodiversity system remains one of

the largest barriers to achieving biodiversity outcomes in an efficient and joined-up way across regions and ecosystems.

Despite the emphasis in the NZBS on protecting and restoring biodiversity on private land, the management of land across tenures remains a challenge. Central and local government have legislated roles and responsibilities for biodiversity, but these are ambiguous and result in different approaches across regions. The 2017 Councils thinkpiece stated that a key problem with the current biodiversity system is a lack of statutory mechanisms that take a tenure-neutral approach to biodiversity prioritisation and management.

The lack of clear accountability and responsibilities made it difficult to prioritise resources or coordinate initiatives at the highest level. The NZBS was lacking a robust prioritisation framework to help direct resources and decision making.

The strategy provided a priority for indigenous biodiversity, but also covered other valued biodiversity such as species New Zealand is dependent on for primary production and those valued for aesthetic, cultural and recreational reasons..... No clear accountability or detailed strategies for that biodiversity have been achieved., and in That gap is a significant issue a context where there is an increasing need for access to genetic resources and increased difficulties achieving that (e.g. for biocontrol, crop development to address climate change effects) that gap is a significant issue.

### **Monitoring and review**

A major barrier to tracking progress on the goals and actions of the NZBS has been the lack of sufficient monitoring and reporting systems. Green and Clarkson stated that the NZBS included very few time-bound and quantifiable targets. They recommended that where appropriate, quantifiable targets should be set over 5, 10 or 15 year periods so that progress could be measured. They also recommended more formal audit and review arrangements be put in place. Despite this, the 2005 review remains the only formal independent review of the NZBS.

Being able to report progress on the NZBS requires robust and comprehensive monitoring systems for measuring biodiversity. Green and Clarkson identified the need for the development of key environmental indicators for land, freshwater and marine environments, appropriate for monitoring and reporting requirements at regional and national levels.

In the 2017 thinkpiece, Regional Councils highlighted the monitoring of the overall state of biodiversity as an unresolved issue. They called for the implementation of a standardised biodiversity monitoring programme across all regional councils that allows for comprehensive reporting consistent with that of DOC.

### **Lack of progress on key issues**

There are a number of core issues that the NZBS either didn't address or was unable to progress. These include:

- The consideration of climate change impacts on biodiversity
- Addressing the low value given to biodiversity by society, often due to a general lack of knowledge or understanding of what biodiversity is, how natural systems function and the benefits they provide
- The integration and valuation of biodiversity into our decision-making frameworks
- Legal protection mechanisms that are comprehensive and well enforced



Linked to this was a lack of flexibility and adaptability built into the NZBS to respond to new challenges. For example, the 2005 review noted that the impact of climate change on biodiversity needed to be added to the outcomes and goals. It wasn't until the new Action Plan was developed in 2016 that the outcomes and goals were updated to include climate change and other emerging issues.

Vanishing Nature, a 2015 book authored by Marie Brown, RT Theo Stephens, Raewyn Peart and Bevis Fedder and published by the Environmental Defence Society, provides an analysis of current and future actions needed to address biodiversity loss. Vanishing Nature highlights ongoing problems surrounding conservation on private land, the need for more action to reverse degradation of freshwater ecosystems, and difficulties gathering information and understanding of the marine environment. Vanishing Nature also provides a solutions framework to address the outlined issues and drivers of biodiversity loss.

As part of the consultation on Te Koiora o te Koiora in 2019, some Treaty partners commented that there has been a shift in the past 20 years, from most conservation work being seen to be done by Pākehā, to increasing levels of iwi-driven conservation work. While this was seen as positive, concerns were raised about instances of some iwi/hapū/whanau unable to lead restoration initiatives due to resourcing constraints, or being prevented from making leadership decisions.

## Next steps

The assessment of the 2000 NZBS outlined in this report has been taken into consideration during the development of a new national biodiversity strategy. Building on the success of the last 20 years, the new strategy will enable us to ramp up our efforts and ensure that the biodiversity system is set up for success.

## Appendix: Links to full reports

Green & Clarkson (2005) The synthesis report: Turning the tide? A review of the first five years of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy.

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/science-publications/conservation-publications/a-review-of-the-first-five-years-of-the-nz-biodiversity-strategy/>

Green & Clarkson (2005) Review of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy Themes.

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/nz-biodiversity-strategy-themes.pdf>

Addressing New Zealand's Biodiversity Challenge: A Regional Council thinkpiece on the future of biodiversity management in New Zealand (2017)

<https://www.es.govt.nz/Document%20Library/Other%20resources/Biosecurity%20resources/Addressing%20New%20Zealand's%20biodiversity%20Challenge.PDF>

Report of the Biodiversity Collaborative Group (2018)

[http://www.biodiversitynz.org/uploads/1/0/7/9/107923093/final\\_online\\_-\\_biodiversity\\_group\\_report\\_1\\_oct\\_4pm.pdf](http://www.biodiversitynz.org/uploads/1/0/7/9/107923093/final_online_-_biodiversity_group_report_1_oct_4pm.pdf)

*The Biodiversity Collaborative Group (BCG) was a stakeholder-led group established by the Minister for the Environment in 2017 to develop national level policy for indigenous biodiversity in the face of ongoing decline and an urgent need for action to reverse this. The BCG released a report and a draft National Policy Statement for Indigenous Biodiversity in October 2018.*

Te Kōiropa o te Kōiropa: Proposals for a biodiversity strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand (2019)

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/protecting-and-restoring/biodiversity-discussion-document.pdf>

Submissions to the Department of Conservation on the 2018 Discussion Document Te Kōiropa o te Kōiropa: Proposals for a biodiversity strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/anzbs-summary-submissions>

Vanishing Nature

Brown, MA; Stephens RTT; Peart, R. Fedder, B. (2015) Vanishing Nature: facing New Zealand's biodiversity crisis. Environmental Defence Society, Auckland