

# Role and effectiveness of conservation boards as a community voice in conservation management

Carla Wilson

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# Role and effectiveness of conservation boards as a community voice in conservation management

Carla Wilson

Research, Development & Improvement Division, Department of Conservation,  
P.O. Box 10-420, The Terrace, Wellington 6143, New Zealand  
Email: [chwilson@doc.govt.nz](mailto:chwilson@doc.govt.nz)

## ABSTRACT

Five case studies of New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC) conservation boards were conducted to investigate the role of boards as an effective community voice in conservation management. Information was obtained through a literature review of board documents, individual in-depth qualitative interviews with board members and DOC staff working with boards, and by participant observation at board meetings. The report provides an overview of the role of conservation boards in relation to strategy, advice and advocacy. Factors influencing whether boards are an effective community voice are assessed. Key factors include: board composition, the commitment of members, a team approach, community networks, relationship with DOC, role and priorities, focus on strategy or operational issues, and meeting processes adopted. The study identified four types of conservation boards, based on their main operational style: the strategy board, the advocacy board, the advice board and the information board. The report highlights key considerations for conservation boards and DOC if boards are to provide an effective community voice in conservation management. These include boards needing the time and resources to develop a board strategy that is regularly evaluated in order to identify the type of board they want to be and their priorities, thereby managing their limited time, and helping to build a team approach.

Keywords: conservation boards, Department of Conservation, community, case studies, New Zealand

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# 1. Introduction

Conservation boards are independent statutory bodies, established under the Conservation Act 1987, which provide advice to The Department of Conservation (DOC) and the New Zealand Conservation Authority (NZCA)<sup>1</sup> on conservation-related matters within their area of jurisdiction. The functions of boards are set out in section 6M(1) of the Conservation Act and in a number of other acts including the National Parks Act 1980, the Reserves Act 1977 and the Wildlife Act 1953. There are 14 conservation boards, each with a defined geographical area (Fig. 1) and up to 12 members.

The functions and powers of conservation boards are set out in the Conservation Act 1987, the National Parks Act 1980, Reserves Act 1977 and New Zealand Walkways Act 1990. The boards focus on policy issues, planning and strategic direction, but not the day-to-day operational details of DOC's work (DOC 2000b). Some of the key functions and powers of the boards as identified in the Conservation Act are outlined below:

- To recommend the approval by the NZCA of conservation management strategies and the review and amendment of such strategies.
- To approve conservation management plans and the review and amendment of such plans.
- To advise the NZCA and the Department on implementing conservation management strategies and conservation management plans
- To advise the NZCA or the Department on any conservation matter relating to any area within the boards jurisdiction
- To advocate the boards interests at any public forum or in any statutory planning process
- To appear before courts and tribunals in New Zealand and be heard on matters affecting or relating to the board's functions

Further information on board responsibilities and functions can be found in Appendix 1 and in the guide to conservation boards' responsibilities and functions (DOC 2004).

Each conservation board is made up of people drawn from the community. Each board has a chairperson who is elected by the board members and boards are serviced by DOC staff with a contact person for each board (usually from the DOC Conservancy that covers the area the board represents).

The notion that boards provide a community voice in conservation is referred to in the Department of Conservation' (DOC's) published material (DOC n.d.; DOC 2000b). For example:

*Conservation boards are there to ensure that the community has a voice in conservation management. They represent the long-term public interest, including that of tangata whenua, in conservation and are closely involved in local conservation planning and policy development affecting the Department's management of public conservation areas (DOC n.d.).*

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<sup>1</sup> The NZCA is an independent statutory body appointed by the Minister of Conservation to advise on DOC's priorities, policies and practices at the national level (DOC 2000c.)

Figure 1. Location of New Zealand's 14 conservation boards and their boundaries.



The term 'community voice' can be used to describe the way in which boards give a community perspective in conservation management. While this role is not set out in legislation, the Minister of Conservation does need to have regard to the interests of the local community when appointing board members. However, as this research will illustrate, there are multiple and often conflicting views across the Department and from board members as to whether the board should provide a 'community voice' and the nature and extent of this 'voice'.

'Community' as a term is usually very broadly defined and can include geographic communities (e.g. neighbours next to a national park), demographic communities (e.g. ethnic communities), interest-based communities (e.g. farmers and trampers), key associates (e.g. regional councils) and special partners like tangata whenua (DOC 2003).

The purpose of this research was to better understand how the five conservation boards referred to in this study provide a voice for the community in conservation management through fulfilling their legislative functions, and to identify any barriers to boards providing a community voice, and areas for improvement.

## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research were to:

- Provide an overview of the roles that the five conservation boards involved in this study play in conservation management.
- Identify the issues and factors that influence the effectiveness of the case study conservation boards in their ability to provide a community voice in conservation management.
- Make recommendations and identify key considerations for ensuring conservation boards provide an effective community voice in conservation management.

This research is based on interviews with staff and conservation board members in five case study conservancies: Auckland, Bay of Plenty, East Coast/Hawke's Bay, Otago and West Coast. The location of each of these boards is shown on Fig. 1.

This report does not provide a complete picture of conservation boards in New Zealand. Rather, it gives some insight into the five case study boards. However, issues identified from the case studies are likely to be pertinent to the rest of the boards. On this basis, it is envisaged that the report will help DOC staff and conservation boards better understand the different ways that conservancies and boards work together in conservation management, and will contribute to ongoing discussions amongst board members and staff on the best ways to provide an effective voice in conservation management.

## 2. Methods

This research was initially proposed by staff working with conservation boards in three different conservancies. The original proposal was for a postal survey of all boards as well as in-depth case study research with a sample of boards. Because of resource limitations, only the qualitative case study research was carried out. It is recommended that any further work in this area involve a broader survey of all boards.

This study involved in-depth research using qualitative methods, with five conservation board 'case studies'. Case study research is one of the most common ways of doing qualitative social research. When undertaking multiple case studies, balance and variety are important in the selection process. The purpose of a case study report is not to represent the complete picture and generalise findings, but to represent the case studies at a particular point in time and to identify what can be learnt from them (Stake 2003).

Qualitative research focuses on gaining in-depth understanding of issues and does not require complete representativeness when participants are selected (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). The five boards involved in this research were selected after notifying boards and staff that the research had been suggested, sending out a draft research proposal to boards asking for feedback, and inviting boards to volunteer to be a case study. A lot of positive support was received from

boards and staff. Discussions were then held in order to ensure that the selected boards reflected a range of different geographic areas, conservation issues, socio-economic and demographic communities. For example, the case studies included boards with high and low percentages of DOC-managed land, boards with significant iwi/hapu populations, boards with and without multi-cultural populations, and boards which had high and low profiles in the community.

The researcher then wrote to the chairpersons of the five case study boards outlining what the case study research would involve and when it would be taking place and that the researcher would make contact again to arrange interviews (see Appendix 2).

The case study research included key three methods: a literature review, qualitative interviews and participant observation.

**Literature review:** This involved analysing relevant documents relating to each of the five case study boards. These included strategic documents, annual reports, board minutes, agendas, briefing papers, and induction material. This review was carried out as part of the scoping of the project in order to familiarise the researcher with the work of conservation boards and to help define and clarify the objectives and nature of the research. The review also analysed material relating to board meeting procedures.

**Qualitative interviews:** These involved undertaking individual, qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with board members and DOC staff working with the board in the five case study conservancies. Two interview schedules were prepared—one for board members and one for DOC staff—to help guide and shape the discussions (see Appendix 3). These served as a checklist to ensure that all key topics had been covered in the interview. The content and direction of each interview was determined by each respondent.

Following the initial contact with the chairperson of each board, a one-page summary of the research was prepared and sent to board members and staff in the five case study boards inviting them to participate in the research and be interviewed. Interviews were timed to correspond with the week of the next board meeting in each case study. All participation was voluntary and by self-selection. It should be noted that self-selection may have led to the research capturing the views of a higher than average proportion of board members who were committed to the work of the board or who had concerns or issues they wanted to raise.

Participants involved in the research and interview responses have been kept anonymous. Prior to giving consent to be interviewed, the participants were made aware of the purpose of the research and how the information would be used. Extensive notes were taken during the interviews by the author and the interviews were not recorded.

In total, 48 interviews were carried out. Sixteen conservation board members and 20 Department staff were interviewed in person and 12 board members were interviewed by telephone. The chairpersons of all the case study boards were interviewed. Apart from two board members who were interviewed together, all the other board members were interviewed individually. The interviewees chose where the interviews were held and these included places of work, homes and DOC offices. All interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and refreshments

were provided by the researcher during the face-to-face interviews. Because of the limited time available for each case study, and the fact that the board members interviewed were distributed over a large geographical area, telephone interviews were used in some cases as the most convenient option. Nearly equal numbers of male and female board members were interviewed. Most had been on the conservation board for at least 2 years, which possibly indicates that the interviewees were more confident about their roles on the board and more willing to share their thoughts and opinions than newer members.

In three of the case studies, six board members volunteered to be interviewed. In one case, seven board members were interviewed and in another case, only three members were willing to be interviewed.

**Participant observation:** This involved the researcher attending five board meetings (one for each board) to observe and learn more about the contents and dynamics of board meetings. According to Tolich & Davidson (2003: 132), observation research 'is research based on watching what people do ... and can be used in novel ways as a primary method of data collection'.

To analyse the data, material was organised into a series of broad themes relating to the research objectives. The material included in this report was selected by the researcher based on an assessment that it provided a picture of the key issues and significant themes identified through the case studies. According to Tolich & Davidson (2003: 124) 'qualitative research draws heavily on impressions, descriptions and quotes'.

A draft report was sent to all participants for comment prior to publication. The participants' wide range of views and levels of engagement in commenting on the report reinforced the diversity of the experiences and expectations of the case study boards and conservancies. Most of the feedback on the draft report from board members and staff was positive with some boards and conservancies using the early draft report as a starting point for discussing and reviewing the roles and functions of the board. However, a few interviewees raised concerns about the nature and purpose of the research. Where relevant to the objectives of the research, this feedback was incorporated into the body of the report and into the conclusions and recommendations. A few participants also raised concerns that the research had been undertaken by a DOC staff member and therefore could not be objective or neutral. All participants will receive a final copy of the report.

### 3. Role of conservation boards

While the legislation (see section 1) does not specifically state that conservation boards have a role in representing community views, each board is made up of people drawn from the community and so provides for community representation in conservation management. According to DOC (2000b):

*A conservation board provides for interaction between a community and the Department at the conservancy level ... Each board represents the community interest in the work of the Department and conservation in general within that board's area of jurisdiction.*

Potential board members are identified through a public nomination process. The Minister of Conservation is then responsible for making appointments to the board. The Minister's aim is to appoint members whose knowledge, skill, and commitment can enhance the protection of the natural and historic resources of the region represented by the board. The following paragraph (DOC 2000b) elaborates on this process:

*The appointment process seeks a diversity of experience and background and a spread across the main geographical and ecological zones within a board's area. Members may have knowledge of nature conservation, natural earth and marine sciences, cultural heritage, recreation, tourism, the local community and Maori perspectives. In other words, on any one board there may be teachers, farmers, fishers, scientists, builders, tourist operators, regional or district councillors, home makers, kaumatua and retired persons.*

Once appointed to a board, members have to exercise the powers and functions as set out in the Conservation Act (Appendix 1). Board members are not on the board to represent the organisations or persons who nominated them and must look across the spectrum of conservation issues. According to DOC (2000b):

*They are appointed as individuals to bring to the board their expertise, knowledge and perspective, as well as the concerns of different sections of the community, so that sound decisions can be made.*

While the specific functions and powers of the conservation boards are clearly laid out in legislation, each board will have different priorities and focus on different areas of work. The various foci of the boards will play a key role in determining the ways in which boards can be an effective community voice. The three broad purposes of the boards—strategy, advice, and advocacy—(as outlined in the legislation), are discussed below.

### 3.1 STRATEGY

A key role of conservation boards is to recommend approval and advise on the implementation of DOC's Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) and, where relevant, national park management plans and conservation management plans. A major responsibility for each board is to oversee the implementation of the CMS for its region. The CMS is a 10-year plan which implements general policies and establishes objectives for the integrated management of natural and historic resources, and for recreation, tourism and other conservation purposes (DOC 2000b).

### 3.2 ADVOCACY

Each conservation board also has power to advocate its interest at any public forum or in any statutory planning process. This can involve making submissions on issues relevant to the board as directed by the CMS and raising public awareness of conservation management issues. The advocacy role can be of benefit to DOC as boards can comment on wider issues than DOC may be able to. The advocacy role can be complementary to the work of DOC as the boards can become additional voices for conservation.

### 3.3 ADVICE

Each board is also responsible for advising the NZCA and DOC on conservation matters relating to any area within the board's jurisdiction. As well as giving advice to DOC and the NZCA, the advice function also involves each board receiving information and updates from DOC. As part of this role, DOC provides board members with the departmental reviews, plans and strategies that they would like feedback on. In some cases, advice on concession<sup>2</sup> applications for activities on land managed by DOC is a significant part of this work.

## 4. Factors influencing the effectiveness of boards as community voices

### 4.1 COMPOSITION

When appointing board members, the Minister of Conservation must have regard for the particular features of the land administered by the Department as well as the interests of nature conservation, natural earth and marine sciences, recreation, tourism and the local community, including tangata whenua (Conservation Act 1987: s.6P(2)).

Diversity amongst the people on boards is a key factor in the appointment process. This may be easier to achieve in some areas than in others depending on, for example, the population and demographics of the area, whether there are tertiary institutions and conservation-related businesses in the area, and the extent to which the people involved in the decision-making process endeavour to appoint a diverse board.

While it is important for boards to have a range of members, a lot of the survey participants stressed the importance of boards having people who have expertise in conservation management (e.g. scientists and retired university professors). Some participants expressed frustration that some board members lacked knowledge of many aspects of conservation management. A lot of information is very technical and some participants commented that they found it difficult to engage in discussions or provide comment. For example, some board members commented that they didn't feel comfortable making submissions to statutory planning processes if the relevant skills were not present amongst the people on the board. Thus, while boards are made up of people from the community, there was often a suggestion that in order for the board to be effective and have credibility, they needed to have some conservation expertise. According to one participant:

*You wouldn't put someone on the board of Air New Zealand who is just interesting in flying. We are dealing with New Zealanders heritage. It's not appropriate any more to put someone on the conservation board who is*

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<sup>2</sup> A concession is official authorisation to undertake an activity in an area managed by DOC. It may be in the form of a lease, permit or easement (DOC 2000a).

*kind of interested in nature ... Conservation management relationships are complex, it's not just about holding kiwis and patting school kids on the head.*

However, while business boards (such as Air New Zealand's) will bring in specialist expertise, it is not a requirement that board members in other sectors have specialist expertise and, in the case of conservation boards, this specialist expertise is to be provided by DOC.

There appeared to be tension between wanting a broad range of people on boards to provide a community voice, but also wanting 'experts' in conservation management who could give boards credibility. Staff and board members in some case studies believed they had the right mix; but in others, staff and board members expressed frustration at the composition of the board and believed a lack of expertise in and/or commitment to conservation undermined the ability of boards to be an effective community voice. According to some participants, appointing people who were not publicly elected limits the potential of the boards to be a voice of the community and to represent a broad range of views.

## 4.2 COMMITMENT

From the interviews and participant observation it appeared that making the board an effective voice often came down to the interest and commitment of individual members. This appeared to vary between and within conservation boards. While many board members dedicated a lot of time to reading papers before a meeting, there were comments that some members appeared not to read any material prior to a meeting. Some survey participants commented that they found this frustrating. When a board was dominated by a group of people who had not undertaken any background reading, some participants commented that there was limited opportunity for constructive debate and advice and meaningful contributions. One participant described how these meetings were often reactive and the DOC staff defensive, with board members 'shooting from the hip'.

One survey participant described their experience with the conservation board:

*I was surprised that not many of them turned up. They were a lot less knowledgeable than I thought they'd be. They hadn't read the agenda. Some people put in a lot, some don't. Some don't say anything and then others dominate—that's just people. I was surprised that they often just agreed with the conservator and the community relations manager, like they hadn't thought about it properly. They don't question things they should.*

It appears that the level of commitment associated with being a conservation board member varied enormously within and between boards. The members of some boards stayed in contact between meetings through email lists, sub-committee meeting and telephone conversations; on other boards, members did not appear to have any contact between meetings.

Some survey participants could give examples of board members who opened their papers for the first time at the meeting. Although they are paid for meetings and expenses, some board members described themselves as 'volunteers'. This view may be used to explain the more relaxed approach some board members had to their responsibilities as observed by some survey participants. However, it

was evident that other board members were deeply committed to conservation, interested in conservation management and spent a lot of time working on issues between meetings.

#### 4.3 TEAM APPROACH

The extent to which a conservation board is effective as a community voice is also influenced by the ability of the board to work as a team. While some boards appeared to work as effective teams, members of other boards appeared to attend meetings as a collection of individuals, without a sense of common purpose or identity.

From the participant observations, it was evident that some board members attended board meetings primarily with another 'hat' on, such as interest group or iwi/hapu representative or local councillor. According to one survey participant:

*A lot of conservation board members have their own agendas. There are a lot of local government councillors that think like councillors when they are on the conservation board. They are not conservation board members, they are thinking about their other roles.*

Thus, not all board members identify themselves as part of the collective identity which is the conservation board. Instead, they may implicitly position themselves first and foremost as a local councillor or the local Forest & Bird member on the board. It is difficult to form a group identity or collective view if board members primarily align themselves with other bodies. The boards were often not a united team and, as Kilmister (1993: 141) notes in relation to non-profit boards, there should be the recognition that this is not a 'group', rather 'a collection of individuals with the potential to become a group'. The group identity then forms around the development and commitment to a common goal and purpose.

In order to develop a team approach, some participants highlighted the need for deliberate team-building. This view is reinforced in a report on boards from Creative New Zealand & Nahkies (2003: 70):

*It is only after people are comfortable with each other and their roles and have developed together shared expectations about the way the board will go about its job that they will finally function well as a team ... If the board only attends to the business side of its work and the social dynamics are left to chance, the board will remain a group of individuals or a series of small cliques, not a synergistic team.*

Participant observations from five board meetings showed that there is often not a lot of time, if any, on the agenda for relationship building, networking, and defining a common purpose and identity. Some boards did not appear to have a common set of goals that all members had bought into or an agreed strategic direction to help cement their identity as a group.

A number of survey participants commented on the need to form networks and links within the board and spoke positively about overnight field trips where members could relax and talk socially. They were able to find out what one another's interests were and start thinking proactively. They were very positive about opportunities to make these informal contacts to help develop their connectedness as a board and establish a rapport.

The following quote from Kilmister (1993: 138) captures the importance of team work for boards who, outside meetings, may have very little to do with each other:

*As a group, the board needs consciously and deliberately to work at becoming an effective unit, able to function beyond the individual aspirations of members.*

#### 4.4 ACTIVE COMMUNITY NETWORKS

A key feature of boards providing a community voice is that individual board members and the board as a whole have effective community networks. Most of the board members interviewed belonged to different groups and some had been invited to report to their groups on their work with the board. Some of these members had served as a link between the community and DOC and had passed on issues and concerns to DOC when they arose. Most did not have a formal system of linking with their wider networks and communities about the board's work but commented that they often told their friends and associates about DOC's work or defended it. According to one survey participant:

*I'm a user of the conservation estate. I now understand much better where the Department is coming from and where they are going to. I can explain that to people. I will carry on being an advocate for conservation.*

Another participant commented:

*They are a link to a range of different communities and clubs and can network back to that. They provide a link to a range of other things—Forest & Bird, councils, iwi, tramping clubs, search and rescue. They're able to get people involved in projects. They will correct misinformation about the Department. They play a vital role in our work with the community.*

However, some survey participants were concerned that many members did not have a connection to the community and were limited in their ability to be a community voice. Some participants were also confused about what their role was meant to be in relation to representing the wider community and what it meant to provide a 'community voice'. As one participant questioned:

*It's still not clear to me how much conservation board members are there to represent community views ... Am I representing myself or the community? Am I spouting my own views or views of the community at large? I don't think the board manages it very well.*

The key communities for boards were often identified as local government and relevant statutory bodies. Some boards had actively tried to build links with these groups through inviting them to lunch or to attend parts of board meetings. Some boards went further in attempting to develop relationships with their key communities through their choice of meeting venues, including meeting on marae. One board had organised a community forum as part of their advocacy function to bring key players in the community together to network and discuss an issue they had identified as strategically important for the region. The public forum at each board meeting is also an opportunity for boards to provide a link between DOC and communities, but most survey participants commented that this was not heavily used and this was confirmed through the participant observations.

## 4.5 RELATIONSHIP WITH DOC

The nature of the relationship between board members and DOC staff was a key factor influencing the effectiveness of the five case study boards in providing a community voice. Having a good relationship with DOC can be defined as a board understanding its work (and DOC understanding the board's work) and there being mutual respect and trust between DOC staff and board members.

A number of board members interviewed were critical of DOC and DOC staff, and some appeared to have a limited understanding of DOC's work. Just as board members often did not have a good understanding of the day-to-day work of DOC, there was a common view from survey participants that DOC staff in general did not understand the work of the board and viewed them as 'just a group that causes a lot of grief'.

The level of interaction between board members and DOC staff varied significantly between boards. In some cases, the only DOC staff board members had contact with were the board support officer, the conservator and the community relations manager. At the other extreme, some board members received presentations from a variety of DOC staff at each meeting and were encouraged to informally meet with conservancy and area office staff and attend events outside the board meetings. According to one DOC staff member:

*I really like conservation board members who will engage with me, and come and visit the [staff]. I'd really encourage a more engaging relationship with the [staff] ... they are adding value when they do that. We want their views, they are representing the community.*

Where some board members reported that they did not have a lot of interaction with DOC staff or did not receive a lot of information about DOC, some board members were suspicious that DOC was hiding things from them. A number of DOC staff and board members had a strong view that there needed to be a conscious effort made to ensure that staff and board members meet informally, not only at the formal board meetings every few months.

It is evident that there need to be mechanisms to better inform board members about DOC's day-to-day work so it is not the focus of conservation board meetings. As one participant commented, 'Because the conservation board can support the work of the Department and share it with the community, it is important to bring them along and do more with them'. Mechanisms to do this included distributing the conservator's report, DOC staff attending field trips with board members, inviting board members to community and staff events, board members attending staff training like Pukenga Atawhai, and different staff attending the board meetings. Board members who had attended Pukenga Atawhai were very positive about the experience and recommended that others also attend the course.

It was suggested by some survey participants that a good relationship between DOC and boards also involves respecting the independence of boards and providing opportunities for boards to critique, and listening to their views. Some survey participants were critical of chairpersons who had kept everything 'friendly' with DOC and did not 'rock the boat' or challenge the Department. Other participants appeared to be reluctant to conflict with DOC, with one board member commenting that he was 'critical of conservation boards that took on an inspectorate role of school teachers'.

It is important to make a distinction between maintaining a ‘friendly’ relationship and having an ‘effective’ relationship. In some of the case studies, it was evident that board members were not encouraged by the chairperson and staff to actively challenge DOC and move beyond a superficial ‘friendly’ relationship to a more effective relationship. One survey participant observed that ‘there should be a natural tension at times between the conservation board and the Department, otherwise there is not a need [for the board]’.

Across the case studies, the relationships between boards and DOC staff varied markedly. Some interviewed board members felt that they were used by DOC to ‘rubber-stamp’ and support work and did not have any opportunities to critique or suggest their own views. On the other hand, some board members and DOC staff felt that all the board did was critique DOC and that it did not give enough support or work in partnership. Many participants were very positive about DOC staff, and the support they provided, saying that they would ‘go that extra mile’, particularly the board support officer. But some interviewees also observed an ‘anti-DOC sentiment’ amongst some board members.

Some of the participants in one case study commented that DOC was always very critical and dismissive of suggestions from the conservation board and recommended that DOC should trust the board more and seriously consider its suggestions. Some survey participants stated that DOC’s role is not to argue or put board members down:

*Conservation board members need to know advice is taken seriously by the Department. The Department needs to know confidential information given to conservation board members will stay confidential.*

One participant described the relationship as uneasy and awkward—if the conservator directs them too much the board may think the conservator is trying to silence them.

In other case studies, some DOC staff commented that they wanted a board which would challenge DOC in a constructive and helpful way and provide direction. They did not want the board to simply be critical of them, but wanted it to also be a partner and provide positive feedback.

The board budget was a significant issue that affected relationships in a number of case studies. Some interviewees suggested that boards should be funded at a national level from a separate pool, not by conservancies.

*It’s not fair on the conservancy to take out of their budget. It’s not good for relationships with the conservation board if we are taking money away from the Department ... staff are annoyed if we are taking money away from pest control for the conservation board.*

In addition, not all the case study boards are consulted by DOC staff about their budget, and some survey participants stated that they were simply told what their budget will be. This also affects the dynamics of relationship in terms of feeling valued and taken seriously as a partner.

## 4.6 ROLE AND PRIORITIES

There appeared to be a lack of common understanding and agreement amongst board members and DOC staff in each case study on the role of the board, board priorities and the most effective way to use the board. As noted previously, a number of survey participants commented that they were not clear about the role of the conservation board. A frequent comment from board members was that it often took a long time to work out what they were meant to be doing when they were appointed:

*It's taken me 2 years to figure out what I'm meant to be doing. Some of the issues are so complicated ... [I think] I'm never going to get this. [Members] need a good induction process, [as] it takes a while to figure out what you are doing and you don't know other people [on the board].*

The notion that board members did not feel they could make a proper contribution or did not have a clear understanding of their role for the first 1 or 2 years was frequently expressed.

A strong theme that came through the interviews with board members concerned their lack of understanding of much of the information they receive. They were often unclear about the contribution they made as board members. Members were often not clear about their role. For example:

*I was totally out of my depth when I came on the conservation board ... I find strategies and planning out of my league. I'm a real practical person. I felt overwhelmed by clever people. It was close to a year before I put my hand up for anything ... at the first meeting I didn't know what was meaningful for me to say and what wasn't. Because the meeting is so packed, I don't want to waste people's time.*

This lack of understanding of their role also partly explains why board members often focused on familiar issues and operational details. According to survey participants:

*New members are not sure or clear on their role because they focus on what they are comfortable with. Not on the big picture ... they misunderstand [their role] ... I must admit sometimes I go to a conservation board meeting and am not sure what they are talking about.*

*From my observations ... they are not clear [about their role], or if they are clear, they are not happy about working in it. All they do is provide advice. It's all they can do. Their advice is scattered between operational, policy and strategy. I have also observed ... that they might not be clear about how they would expect their advice to be applied.*

*Conservation board members often have no idea what they are meant to be doing. At the conservation board chair's conference I was concerned at the number of conservation boards who talk as if they are the Department. Some are just giving reports on operational work, the Department's work.*

Views on the most effective use of boards and the priorities for boards varied significantly within and between case study boards and also between boards and DOC. According to one survey participant:

*The induction process is fairly theoretical so it still comes as a surprise, the things we are asked to consider. We need training and examples of how*

*to look at issues and at what level and some examples. It's so easy to get distracted when there are so many people with different issues. I realise the meeting has gone and we haven't used the time effectively.*

Boards have a range of statutory functions and powers (see section 1). However, different boards and conservancies will have different views on the most effective use of board time and priorities for board work across the broad areas of strategy, advocacy, advice and information. The advice function has been separated out to make a distinction between boards that mainly focus on providing advice and boards that appear to mainly receive information.

#### **4.6.1 Strategy**

At the time of this research, four of the case study boards had a current CMS and the focus of their CMS work was, therefore, on advising on the implementation of the strategy. Some of the study boards devoted little time to their CMS implementation role. Three of the boards did not spend a lot of time on the implementation of the CMS (two receive an annual assessment from DOC against the performance indicators for the key areas, and another monitors the CMS through the annual business planning development and reporting process).

However, for one case study board, the main focus of their total work programme was the ongoing implementation of the CMS. In conjunction with DOC staff, the board had developed a 3-yearly audit schedule which reviewed the implementation of the CMS section by section. At each meeting, the board audited specific sections of the CMS, a staff member made a presentation on progress with the CMS implementation for the specific section, and a decision was made by the board as to whether the objectives of the CMS had been met.

While advising on the implementation of the CMS is the role of boards as set out in legislation, a number of survey participants commented that they did not think monitoring the implementation of the CMS was the best use of the board's time. Some participants described the CMS as 'outdated', 'not relevant', and 'meaningless'. The DOC Statement of Intent (SOI)<sup>3</sup>, not the CMS, was sometimes identified as the guiding document for conservancy work.

According to participants:

*[DOC] Staff get frustrated because [they] don't use the CMS in their work ... the board's main function in the Act is to audit the CMS ... But staff don't use the CMS because it's 10 years out of date.*

*Having a community representative group with an outside eye is a good idea, but it's very frustrating that it's in relation to the CMS. In legislation they are the keeper of the CMS so right to focus on it, but the Department has moved away from this.*

*The conservation board knowing where we are in terms of the SOI would be better. The CMS is a guide, I don't like the idea of them monitoring the CMS, it's a guide and we're not working to implement it. We are working to the SOI.*

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<sup>3</sup> The Statement of Intent sets out the longer-term, overall directions for DOC, as well as the management actions that will be undertaken in the coming year. It sets out the Minister of Conservation's and Government's annual expectations of DOC.  
[www.doc.govt.nz/templates/summary.aspx?id=42162](http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/summary.aspx?id=42162) (viewed March 2007).

Thus, while a board may put a lot of effort into the implementation of the CMS as directed in the legislation, it appears that some case study board members often received conflicting messages from DOC, to the effect that this task was ‘a waste of time’. On the other hand, some DOC staff wanted their board to focus on the CMS and the particular board did not appear to be interested. For example:

*I sometimes wonder if they realise how important the CMS is. They base decisions not on the CMS but on what they think as individuals. If I was a conservation board member I'd be frustrated if I write down how I feel and it's ignored because we link everything to plans and strategies, they base their thoughts on individual opinion.*

Although it is a function in legislation, in one case, board members stated that they did not have the resources to focus on the implementation of the CMS and raised this as a significant issue as it is part of their statutory requirements.

#### 4.6.2 Advocacy

Another power conferred upon conservation boards by legislation is advocating their interests at any public forum or in any statutory planning process. This was identified as a useful function by many participants as boards have the freedom to raise awareness or submit on issues independent of DOC. They can act as another conservation partner and can be complementary to the Department. The advocacy function is carried out in a number of different ways. In one case study, the board had identified a small number of key significant conservation issues for their area in their strategic plan and advocated greater awareness and interest in these issues through organising community forums, writing submissions, discussion papers and letters.

In another case study, much of the board's time had been put into lodging written submissions on a significant number of local and central government policy and planning issues. Some survey participants were uncomfortable with the board focusing most of their time on submissions and appeals to statutory planning processes as part of the advocacy function.

According to some participants:

*I wasn't expecting the controversial type of things we get involved in [when I became a board member] ... we've got into areas I don't feel confident [about] and I don't feel the conservation board is confident [about]. I don't think there have been sufficient grounds for some of our submissions—I'm uncomfortable ... sometimes I'm not sure the conservation board is actually right.*

*It never occurred to me to be [heavily involved in statutory planning processes]. I thought we'd be going to community meetings and raising the profile of conservation.*

*It is very difficult, this business of getting involved in resource consent hearings. I thought it was an advisory body, didn't expect that it would go to consent hearings. I'm quite worried about that ... thought that we should be focused on the CMS.*

These activities sometimes appear to fit the mould of independent advocacy group or non-governmental organisation working separately from DOC.

### 4.6.3 Advice

A third function of a conservation board is providing advice to the NZCA and DOC on conservation matters. Many participants in the case studies saw the greatest value in the advice function as being a 'sounding board' for DOC, testing ideas and getting members' opinions and advice to add value to its work. Boards could provide the means of getting community view to conservators quickly. According to a DOC staff member:

*When I deliver a briefing paper I get value out of it because I have to prepare well. [I need to be able to] stand up and say we are on the right track in front of the conservation board ... it's reassurance, a sounding board.*

Some DOC staff also referred to the fact that they currently, or previously, had board members who were highly skilled technical people and they could, therefore, discuss technical things with these people outside meetings. However, participants in the case studies often felt that the decision had already been made by DOC and that they just wanted to run it past them; the phrase 'a rubber-stamp exercise' was frequently used.

In some cases, a key part of the advice function related to concession management, where boards are informed of concession applications and give advice to DOC. It is up to boards to decide whether they give advice on any particular application. Boards may also be consulted over the interpretation of management plans, when a concession application relates to a new activity for which there is no provision in a plan (DOC 2000a). The board's role is to provide policy advice on concession management rather than detailed comments. However, often board discussions will focus on the details of the proposed concession. Across the case studies, the amount of time each board spent on concessions varied; one board spent no time advising on concessions while another spent most of its time advising on this activity. The amount of time spent will depend on the different issues facing each conservancy (e.g. the amount of land managed by DOC, visitor numbers and pressure points); and also on the board's priorities and trigger mechanisms identified by staff and/or board members in each conservancy. However, some survey participants questioned this focus:

*The first thing that struck me was the vast amount of paper. I have a huge laundry basket full of it. Enormous amount of paper. I think our conservation board is more involved in concessions and resource consents than other conservation boards. I wonder if it is appropriate.*

*Do we do too many resource consent submissions?*

*Everyone is well meaning but tends to have their own interests and agendas. We end up talking about concessions in some detail. But reading the Conservation Act we should only talk if a new thing is in a plan. Not whether the Department should be doing it or not. We get a bit bogged down in things.*

Boards have a set of trigger mechanisms to determine when they should engage in conservation management, but some survey participants queried whether those mechanisms worked well.

#### 4.6.4 Information

The advice function for some boards appears to be heavily weighted towards their receiving information and briefings from DOC staff on particular issues without DOC actively seeking information back from them. Some boards seem to place a high priority on receiving information from DOC with a lot of emphasis on reviewing correspondence, receiving reports and briefings and, in some cases, listening to a range of guest speakers. A lot of this information appears to be operational in nature, or the discussion about the information is operational—it appeared that some board members felt most comfortable with this sort of information. Whilst receiving this information was continually identified as very enjoyable by board members; in some cases, there did not appear to be any reciprocal benefits for DOC apart from potentially good public relations associated with the ‘show and tell’ and DOC staff gaining experience presenting to a group. According to one staff member:

*In the last few years the relationship has been defined by informing/educating conservation board members about conservation issues without getting much advice back.*

Where the the relationships between DOC staff and a board was dominated by staff providing information to the board, there was a sense that the board was not independent of DOC, and that it relied heavily on DOC staff for direction and setting the agenda. Some DOC staff put a lot of effort into organising guest speakers, fieldtrips and updating board members on operational business. Boards that have this relationship with DOC can be described as ‘information boards’

The ‘information board’ may exist because board members receive so much material as part of the agenda that they have no time or energy to devote to anything more active. Phrases frequently used by survey participants were ‘information overload’ and ‘overwhelming’. The large size and technical nature of some meeting agendas and the large amounts of paperwork board members received tended to make some survey participants feel that they could not make a valuable contribution to meetings. Participant observation at board meetings found that the case study boards where there was a lot of emphasis on information were relatively passive, with members seldom engaging in debate. These boards often appeared to be led by DOC in meetings. Such passivity may be the result of board composition or that receiving information has been identified as a priority by board members or DOC.

Some survey participants commented that although meeting presentations were interesting and educational, they were often unclear about how they related to the purpose of the conservation board. For example:

*I find it odd that there are no recommendations on anything. [I think] why are you giving us this? What do you want from us? There is nothing. We are not being led properly by the staff... I don't know if they want us to do something. Then find it's only for information.*

*After the second meeting I thought, what is the point? We are not just there because the legislation says so. DOC makes it as comfortable as possible for conservation board members [to not get involved] and limits interaction with staff.*

There are a multitude of functions upon which conservation boards can choose to focus. Some staff and/or boards in the case studies have clearly identified

where they want the board to focus their limited time and energy, while other boards in the research appear to have a much more ad hoc approach to their work and can be overwhelmed by the workload.

*Meetings are so busy and there is an enormous amount conducted by email. I did not expect that there would be such a huge amount to do between meetings, an awful amount of work. We need to do less work in between ... totally snowed under.*

*We've all got lives ... the time in your day is unrealistic. We are an under-resourced voluntary organisation. It's a huge ask of board members to do all this work. The Department wants the conservation board to comment on so many things. The danger is that it just becomes a useful place to say 'we put it through the conservation board and, therefore, the community is OK'. It is a very tricky and dangerous way to use the conservation board. If you want to do anything proactive, you have to be a gatekeeper.*

#### 4.6.5 Setting priorities

There was a lot of discussion on the need for conservation boards to identify priorities and key areas of work. According to one survey participant:

*The board is not sitting around the table saying 'should we be involved?' There is no strategic plan for the conservation board each year that identifies, what are our priorities? What are the issues? Are they being very realistic when they get involved in things? They haven't thought it through. They get involved in resource consent issues but have not thought it through. Does it fit with their functions?*

Some of the case study boards have developed strategic plans that document the key work priorities. However, there was great variation amongst boards on whether these strategic plans were adhered to. In one instance, the board has a lot of ownership of their strategic plan, it is frequently referred to and sets clear boundaries for the tasks they will get involved in and the focus of meetings. As explained by one survey participant:

*The strategic plan priorities help to focus us. There is no discussion on what we're going to do, the group is focused. There is agreement.*

In another case study, the board appeared to have little ownership of its strategic plan and did not appear to set its own direction. The plan was something referred to at the very end of meetings rather than something that set the framework for all of the board's discussions. According to one survey participant:

*We do a strategic plan exercise, it gets put over there and we talk about saving kiwis.*

A number of people surveyed commented that there needed to be more resources and time to train board members on the purpose of conservation boards, their functions, how they operate, and what DOC does.

Any confusion over the roles of boards is not limited to board members, as a number of survey participants commented that they were not sure that many DOC staff members knew what the board was there for either:

*It is really important that we know what is the Department's work? What is our work? Otherwise we don't achieve anything, the boundaries aren't clear.*

The following quote from a participant highlights the importance of boards being involved in deciding their own strategic directions within the legislative framework:

*It really gets back to what the conservation board wants—reactive or proactive ... Reactive is easy, just turn up and make decisions. Proactive is more work, we've got to think. I would like us to be more proactive.*

#### 4.7 STRATEGY VERSUS OPERATIONS

One of the most frequently raised issues was whether boards should focus on strategic issues or involve themselves in operational matters. A strategic framework means that most of the focus should be on advising on the long-term directions of DOC. In a number of the case studies, boards seemed to focus on immediate and ad hoc issues without situating these issues within any wider or longer-term framework. These boards focus mainly on the 'means' (the operational matters) without focusing on the 'ends' (the long-term strategic direction). Boards can be 'continually caught in the treadmill of trivia'. (Kilmister 1993: 145).

Comments from survey participants included:

*They are always wanting be to involved in the little things—like how many weeds got pulled out. That's not their job. They are not going to implement things.*

*Some conservation board members have pet interests ... and they are likely to pursue them, and get into the nitty gritty of DOC work. Sometimes it's a nuisance ... I see their value in advising us on strategic issues.*

*We are constantly reminded that we do tend to get bogged down in trivia ... areas the Department can do ... we're asked to take a helicopter view.*

*[We] struggle to get [the] level of debate with the conservation board at a strategic level, [because] it's not the level they think at ... people get involved [in the board] because they have personal issues.*

Survey participants often linked the success or otherwise of conservation boards as community voices to whether board members and DOC staff understood and adopted a strategic role. At some of the board meetings attended, it appeared that the boundary between strategy and operations was not clear. In the absence of a clearly understood role, boards often appeared to debate and comment on detailed operational matters, like the style of DOC uniforms, the colour of toilet blocks, roadside vegetation, or the details of a new wharf. Some survey participants suggested that conservation board members are often providing advice from personal experience and take on the role of unofficial DOC staff members.

There appeared to be tension at some meetings, with some board members wanting to adopt a management role and attempting to make decisions on DOC operational matters, when the board only has an advisory role. Some survey participants talked about board members spending a long time discussing an issue and making a decision on it, when DOC was only seeking advice or informing the board. Boards are consulted like any other group when DOC gathers information from a range of sources as part of its decision-making process. In some instances, survey participants suggested that DOC added to the confusion some boards experienced and seemed to expect boards to be involved in management issues or were not clear what they wanted from boards. According to one board member:

*We are told our charter is to give policy advice but DOC needs to be better at defining policy and management because they are asking us to rubber-stamp management decisions; this is not proper use of the conservation board.*

As discussed in section 4.6.1, the motivation of many conservation board members to take ownership of the CMS, and the motivation of many DOC staff to spend time preparing reports on the implementation of the CMS, appeared to be limited. In many cases, the CMS was described by DOC staff and conservation board members as out-of-date, its targets no longer relevant, and that it was no longer the strategic focus of the conservancy. It was clear that even if a board had a strategic focus on the implementation of the CMS, this focus did not always suit DOC staff who, in some of the case studies, no longer viewed the priorities and policies outlined in the CMS as relevant to their day-to-day work.

Many of the case study board members at the time of this research were not involved in the development of the CMS documents, hence there appeared to be little ownership of the document by these members and they often had minimal interest in how it was being implemented.

In some cases, it was clear that board members needed to have a better understanding of the CMS and what it is in order to take on this strategic role. For example:

*Some board members don't have ownership of the CMS. I wonder if it's because the CMS is perceived as not really having relevance in contemporary conservation. What they have difficulty doing is looking at current contemporary issues in the context of the CMS. They tend to want to deal with issues in isolation, in absence of any context.*

A key legislative role for boards is to advise on the review, amendment and implementation of strategies and plans. However, there was feedback from some survey participants that the CMS is not the right style of document for this. To them CMSs were considered large and difficult to understand. Many DOC staff do not engage with the CMS and it often just sits on a book shelf. According to some participants, the CMS did not seem to provide an effective strategic framework for many staff and board members. From the participant observation it appeared that, in many cases, advocacy and advice functions are often carried out in the absence of a broader strategic framework with decisions made on an ad hoc basis and often reflecting the personal interests of board members.

## 4.8 MEETING PROCESSES

In the case studies, the processes, agenda and dynamics of board meetings are a key factor in determining whether boards are an effective community voice. Observation of board meetings revealed that every board meeting was significantly different in terms of the role of DOC, the issues covered, and how meetings were chaired.

While some boards set their own meeting agendas and developed their own priorities in consultation with DOC staff, in most cases DOC staff clearly played a significant role in the agenda-setting process. Boards that set their own agendas appeared to have greater ownership of board meetings. In one case, where the board had a lot of ownership of the meeting, the DOC conservator and community relations manager played a low-key role, sitting down the back, and also being absent for part of the meeting. This differed markedly from other boards that

were much more reliant on DOC, where the conservator or community relations manager sat next to the board chairperson and guided them through the meeting. In a number of cases, it was clear that DOC staff were running the meeting.

Having an effective chairperson was frequently identified as key to running an effective board meeting. In some cases, board meetings went well beyond their allocated time and many board members raised concerns about the long days and the amount of paper they had to get through, and the associated frustration or lack of satisfaction. At the meetings attended during the study it was clear that many of the current agendas are not manageable within the given timeframe or a productive use of time. Long board meetings focused on information provision and processing paperwork with few opportunities for discussion or input did not appear to be an effective way of using a board's time. A number of survey participants stressed that it was the responsibility of the chairperson to set a realistic agenda focused on the board's strategic priorities and then maintain a disciplined approach to enforcing the agenda.

From the participant observation, it was apparent that some boards primarily listen and other boards discuss. According to one survey participant:

*I didn't realise how much paper we'd have to work through, the volume of work and issues. There is frustration with the agendas, baggage clogs up the meeting. I come along with ideas but there is no time for this, we are doing low-priority paper work. We've got to pick our own agenda rather than have it led by the Department. All the stuff that the conservation board wants to do doesn't happen. The [Department] wants to keep things smooth, wants to keep a lid on it.*

One participant stressed the need for the agenda to be owned by the board and linked to the board's strategic direction, which is linked to their role in legislation. It was noted that:

*I changed the agenda; it was all reactive operational rubbish. I thought 'let's be proactive'. The conservation board talks about a whole lot of issues that don't matter, where decisions are already made.*

The skills of the chairperson were consistently raised by survey participants as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of a board. Participants identified the importance of having a chairperson who could control meetings, act as a gatekeeper, stay focused and on track, and help the board to work together to reach agreement. In many of the case studies, boards would get diverted into side issues that are more easily addressed, and the chairperson needs to be able to identify whether the discussion fits within board functions and strategic priorities. Some survey participants spoke very highly of their chairperson, while others questioned whether theirs were independent enough of DOC, had ownership of the agenda, were impartial during debate, able to keep the board focused on strategic priorities, and able to encourage a united board view.

## 5. General models of conservation board function

A key finding from this research into five case study conservation boards is the predominant behaviours exhibited by the boards studied. It is possible to summarise these into four models: the strategy board, the advocacy board, the advice board and the information board. These models are not intended to provide a comprehensive typology of all conservation boards, but provide a useful means to illustrate the variation in character and nature of the case study conservation boards. While all of the case study boards were involved in the key tasks of strategy, advocacy and advice, it was clear that some focused more than others on particular areas of work or ways of carrying out their work, and the models were developed from these. The exact focus of individual conservation boards is driven by the priorities set by the DOC staff they interact with and/or the board members themselves. Most boards will not fit entirely within one model but will reflect a combination of the four models. The main reason for identifying and describing the four models is that they provide a useful starting point for considering the role the boards play as a community voice in conservation. The characteristics of each of the four models are presented below.

**Strategy board:** This type of board focuses on approving DOC strategy and plans and providing advice on their implementation. The strategy board has a high level of ownership of the strategic documents and overseeing their implementation. The board takes control of the board meetings and determines the agenda with the assistance of DOC staff. The board identifies its own strategic direction and priorities which gives it a high level of coherency as a team. However, with respect to the CMS, DOC staff may be frustrated by the amount of time they need to spend reporting on a strategy which they do not consider relevant to their work.

**Advocacy board:** This board type makes submissions and lodges appeals on statutory planning processes in relation to the board's functions. Although this is one of the statutory powers of the board, the advocacy board often gets involved in detailed management issues. The board is in control of the process to the extent of being independent of DOC and performing a role similar to that of a non-governmental interest group. The board is reactive to external changes or proposals and is not driven by an internal strategic direction. The advocacy board can be a cohesive group if all board members are in agreement about its role. However, it is likely that some board members and DOC staff will be concerned that such a high level of advocacy is outside the board's role.

**Advice board:** This board type provides advice on conservation matters on which DOC has the authority to make a decision. The board provides advice to DOC on conservation matters and acts as a 'sounding board'. Commonly, the DOC staff involved with the board have already decided on the direction they wish to take and simply want to run their decision past the board. The advice provided by the board is frequently focused on management and operational issues. The board reacts to the key priorities identified by DOC, rather than identifying and acting on its own priorities.

**Information board:** This board type receives information from DOC on a range of strategic and operational issues. DOC is in control of the process and board meetings are filled with correspondence, reports and guest speakers, with limited opportunities for debate and discussion. This type of board may develop in response to the approach taken by the DOC staff the board deals with, or as a result of board members being content to be the recipients of information and choosing not to play active roles on the board. DOC staff dealing with such boards can gain experience in presenting briefings; and in some cases, board members do share the information they gain with others in the community.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The four types of boards described in section 5 serve to demonstrate the range of roles boards assume, either by design or accident (and there are likely to be other roles not identified in this report). Reflection on these board types may enable boards to redefine their purpose and stimulate discussion on their preferred roles, including how they want to allocate their limited time across the functions of strategy, advocacy, provision of advice and information.

This study also identified a number of other issues and factors that contribute to the effectiveness of conservation boards in providing a voice for the community within DOC. Key issues included: the composition of the board, the process used to appoint board members, the commitment of board members, whether the board operates as a united team, whether board members have community networks, whether the board and DOC staff have an effective relationship, the roles and priorities adopted by boards, whether boards are focused on strategic issues and how meetings are run.

One of the key roles of boards is to focus on the implementation of strategies and plans and, in order to achieve this, they need to be advising on the implementation of documents that are valued and owned by both the boards and DOC conservancies. In particular, for many conservation board members and DOC staff, the Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) does not appear to provide an appropriate framework for implementing and monitoring conservation work; the reasons for this and possible solutions need to be explored further.

As well as the CMS, an effective board needs to have its own strategy to enable it to set its own direction and work priorities, and this broad strategy needs to be owned by all board members. Some board members feel very overworked because the board is trying to do too much and is pulled in multiple directions. Boards have a range of legislative functions and it is important that each board decides, as a group and in conjunction with DOC, what its work priorities are, and that the chairperson acts as a gatekeeper to ensure that the board does not get distracted by other tasks. Each meeting agenda should reflect the priorities as identified in the board strategy and it should be a 'live' document. It is likely that working together to develop a strategy that everyone agrees to will also help board members become a united team, leading to a greater understanding of their role and ownership of meetings.

Effective boards work in partnership with DOC and are supported in their priorities (even if these differ from those of DOC). Boards cannot function effectively in isolation, and DOC staff need to understand the role of boards and support and encourage board members to clarify and define their roles in accordance with statutory requirements, and to take ownership of board processes.

It is clear that there needs to be some training undertaken by board members on establishing strategic directions and board priorities. Setting strategic plans helps boards to clarify their purpose, create ownership and set clear boundaries to ensure workloads are not overwhelming for board members and DOC staff. The process of working together to identify their purpose and plan the annual programme in terms of strategy, advocacy and advice should also help each board to build a united and purposeful team.

Finally, effective boards continue to improve and develop. To do this, they need to create space in their meetings to allow members to reflect on, debate and evaluate their role and what they are achieving. Issues they need to consider in such sessions include: what do the legislative functions mean in practice for the board? What are the key priority areas for the board? How can the board be more effective? How will the board evaluate if it has been effective?

## 7. Recommendations

The findings presented in this report and the recommendations arising from them meet the objectives (see section 1.1) identified for this study. The author hopes that they will provide a useful starting point to ongoing discussions amongst DOC staff and conservation board members about the best ways to ensure that boards provide an effective community voice in conservation management.

This report's key recommendations are that:

- A range of ongoing opportunities be provided for conservation board members to learn about the role and purpose of conservation boards and their legislative requirements, including practical induction processes and mentoring by experienced board members, DOC staff and NZCA members.
- The CMS be a 'live' and relevant strategic document so that the conservation boards' role of recommending approval and advising on its implementation has relevance and meaning for DOC staff.
- Each board has the time, space and resources to develop a strategy that outlines its purpose, goals and priorities in relation to its statutory functions. This strategy should be used to set the priorities for each board meeting and to act as a 'gatekeeper' so that the board's workload can be managed.
- The importance of boards forming a group identity and common purpose is recognised, and boards are provided with opportunities (e.g. in meetings and field visits) for members to develop a board identity.
- Improved relationships be built between boards and DOC to increase understanding of each other's roles. This can be done through a variety of means, including inviting a range of DOC staff to present material to boards, encouraging board members to meet with staff informally, inviting board members on field visits and encouraging board members to attend DOC's Pukenga Atawhai courses.

- Boards draw on literature and guidelines on board processes and the knowledge of independent professionals skilled in developing effective boards in order to develop a board strategy and purpose.
- Boards use the models outlined in section 5 as a starting point to discuss where they are currently positioned and where they should be heading.
- Boards undertake a regular evaluation process to review their strategic plan, how they are operating, future directions and expected conservation outcomes.

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# Appendix 1

## FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CONSERVATION BOARDS<sup>1</sup>

### Functions of Boards

1. Under section 6M(1) of the Conservation Act 1987 the functions of each Board are:

- To recommend the approval by the Conservation Authority of conservation management strategies, and the review and amendment of such strategies, under the relevant Acts<sup>2</sup>; (s.6M(1)(a)).
- To approve conservation management plans, and the review and amendment of such plans, under the relevant Acts<sup>3</sup>; (s.6M(1)(b)).
- To advise the Conservation Authority and the Director-General on implementing conservation management strategies and conservation management plans for areas within the Board's jurisdiction; (s.6M(1)(c)).
- To advise the Conservation Authority or the Director-General—
  - (i) On any proposed change of status or classification of any area of national or international importance.
  - (ii) On any other conservation matter relating to any area within the Board's jurisdiction; (s.6M(1)(d)).
- To advise the Conservation Authority and the Director-General on proposals for new walkways in any area within the Board's jurisdiction. See also paragraphs 157-163 of this Guide; (s.6M(1)(e)).
- To liaise with any Fish and Game Council on matters within the Board's jurisdiction; (s.6M(1)(f)).
- To exercise such powers and functions as may be delegated to it by the Minister under this Act or any other Act; (s.6M(1)(g)).
- To have such other functions as are conferred on it by or under the Conservation Act or any other Act. (s.6M(2)).

### Powers of Boards

2. Every Board has all powers that are reasonably necessary or expedient to enable it to carry out its functions. (s.6N(1)).

3. These include:

- Advocating its interests at any public forum or in any statutory planning process; (s.6N(2)(a)).
- Appointing committees of members and other suitable persons, and delegating to them functions and powers. (s.6N(2)(b)).
- Appearing before courts and tribunals in New Zealand and being heard on matters affecting or relating to the Board's functions. (s.6N(3)).

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<sup>1</sup> From: Department of Conservation 2004: Guide to conservation boards' responsibilities and functions. Unpublished report, Business Management Division, Department of Conservation, Wellington. 48 p.

<sup>2</sup> The Wildlife Act 1953, the Marine Reserves Act 1971, the Reserves Act 1977, the Wild Animal Control Act 1977, the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978, the National Parks Act 1980, the New Zealand Walkways Act 1990, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 or the Conservation Act 1987.

<sup>3</sup> These are the Wildlife Act 1953, the Marine Reserves Act 1971, the Reserves Act 1977, the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 2000 or the Conservation Act 1987. See also paragraph 145 for national park management plans.

# Appendix 2

## LETTER TO BOARDS

Dear XXX

As agreed at your recent Conservation Board meeting, I am really pleased that the XXX Conservation Board is happy to be involved in research to look at the different ways that conservation boards and the Department work together in order to achieve conservation outcomes.

This research was initiated as a result of the development of the Department's Conservation with Communities Strategy in 2003. According to the Strategy, conservation boards are one of the key communities that the Department works with. It is, therefore, important that we better understand the different ways that the board (as a key community) and the Department work together and how board members and Department staff view the role of the board in our work with the wider community.

This research will be based on interviews with board members, staff and other key community groups and individuals in five case study conservancies as well as a postal questionnaire of all board members and selected staff. For XXX Board members, the research will involve meeting with me, either separately or together, for approximately one or two hours to discuss the Board's work and the role of the Board in the Department's work with the wider community. I would like to time my visit around your Board meeting on XXX so I can also attend your meeting.

Once the report is completed in 2005 I would be happy to come back and present the findings to Board members and staff.

I will be in touch closer to the time and will continue to liaise with XXX. Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Kind regards

Carla Wilson  
Scientific Officer—Social Science

# Appendix 3

## A 3.1 CONSERVATION BOARD (CB) INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Introduction

- How long have you been a CB member?
- Why did you decide to become a CB member?

### Role of board members and the board

- What were your expectations when you became a CB member?
- How has your experience differed from your expectations?
- What have been the highlights for you? The most satisfying?
- What projects have worked well and why?
- What projects haven't worked well and why?
- What changes have you seen in the CB over your term?

### Relationship with the Department

- What is your understanding of the purpose/role of the CB?
- Is this how it works in reality? Why? Why not? What are the barriers?
- What are the key issues/priorities for you CB?
- What should/shouldn't the CB focus on?
- Can you describe the relationship between the CB and the Department?
- What factors influence the success of the relationship between the Department and the CB?
- How can the CB be of greatest value to the Department?
- How would you improve the relationship between the CB and the Department?
- In what ways do you have contact with Department staff?

### Relationship with the community

- What is your understanding of the CB's role in relation to the wider community?
- Do CBs have a role to play in facilitating/encouraging local community involvement and awareness of conservation issues? Why? Why not? What are the barriers?
- Has your CB been involved in any initiatives to raise awareness of conservation issues and encourage local community involvement? Why? Why not?
- What mechanisms are used by boards to interact directly with their communities?
- What are the key community groups the CB keeps in touch with? (including iwi/hapu)

- What role does the CB play in relationships with local iwi/hapu?
- How does the CB provide 'a link between the Department and the community'?

#### Conclusions/recommendations

- How can CBs be of greatest value to the Department? And the community?
- What recommendations do you have for DOC in terms of developing a relationship with and utilising their CB?
- Where would you like to see the CB in 5 years' time?

## A 3.2 DOC STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Introduction

- How long have you worked for DOC?
- What is your role in relation to the CB?
- How much contact do you have with the CB?

### Relationship with the conservation board

- What is your understanding of the purpose of the CB in relation to the Department's work?
- Is this how it works in reality? Why? Why not? What are the barriers?
- Can you describe the relationship between the CB and the Department?
- What factors influence the success of the relationship between the Department and the CB?
- How can the CB be of greatest value to the Department?
- In what ways do you have contact with CB members?
- How would you improve the relationship between the CB and the Department?

### Relationship with the community

- What is your understanding of the CB's role in relation to the wider community?
- What is the role of the CB in relation to the Department's 'Conservation with Communities Strategy'?
- Do CBs have a role to play in facilitating/encouraging local community involvement and awareness of conservation issues? Why? Why not? What are the barriers?
- Has your CB been involved in any initiatives to raise awareness of conservation issues and encourage local community involvement? Why? Why not?

### Conclusions/recommendations

- How can CBs be of greatest value to the Department? And the community?
- Where would you like to see the relationship between the Department and the CB in 5 years' time?