

Goals and Keys of the New Zealand Strategy of Biodiversity — to Turn the Tide

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Like Japan, New Zealand is an island chain on the Pacific "Rim of Fire". Its land has been upthrust by many earthquakes. The three main islands stretch 1600 km north to south, with a combined area of 270,500 square kilometres – about the same area as Japan. New Zealand is mountainous, with 18 peaks over 3000 metres. Like Japan, for a period of its history, it was joined by a land bridge to its nearest continental neighbour – Australia. However, whereas Japan was linked during the last ice ages, New Zealand has not had a continental link for 80 million years. Thus, the New Zealand archipelago is one of the most isolated landmasses on Earth. We have been adrift from other southern continents for up to 80 million years. Evolution through a long period of isolation created unique flora and fauna.

New Zealand still has most of its flora (over 80% endemism in most groups); over 100 species of endemic flightless crickets; a huge fauna of endemic land snails; the largest fauna of lizards on any temperate archipelago; the tuatara (sole representative of a Triassic group of reptiles); the flightless kiwi; the world's heaviest and most peculiar parrot (the kakapo); and endemic bats. The islands also provide breeding grounds for 75% of the world's penguin species, 54% of the world's albatrosses and half of the world's petrels, shearwaters and prions. Long isolation and slow evolution meant these plants and animals were especially vulnerable to new changes. New Zealand was one of the last large land areas on earth to be settled by humans. The settlers, and the exotic species they brought with them, had a dramatic impact on our indigenous biodiversity.

The history of people on these islands has been brief but enormously destructive. Since first settlement by Maori 1000 years ago and Europeans 200 years ago we have lost 43% of the frog fauna and over 40% of the bird fauna; the giant gecko has gone along with the flightless wrens, giant eagle and moa. New Zealand's climate and soils are ideal for agriculture and forestry. Most lowland forest has given way to agriculture and plantation forestry, and most wetlands have been drained.

Remaining ecosystems have been invaded by alien plants, are browsed by alien herbivores and are preyed on by alien mammals. New Zealand now has as many threatened species as the whole USA (over 600).

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1991) was a "wake up" call for the whole world. New Zealand was a signatory and ratified the convention in 1993. New Zealand had had a century of local initiatives, and some large government programmes, often focussed in remote or protected areas. Government came to recognise that biodiversity conservation could not be achieved only in protected areas and on remote islands. It had to take place across the whole landscape, in rivers and wetlands, and in the oceans. It had to take place in farmland, forests, and urban areas. It had to involve people. Integration of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies is a general requirement of the Convention on Biological Diversity (Article 6(b)), and was a factor in the establishment of a wide cross-agency process, and a programme of community involvement in developing the strategy.

In involving the public, we had to explain biodiversity to them in a story that was exciting and challenging. The presenter told the story of New Zealand's long isolation – of separating from Gondwana and of 80 million years of separate evolution. Then, it talked about how much we had lost. We spoke about how the tide is going out on New Zealand's biodiversity. We spoke about the

effects of forest clearance, of overfishing, of pests and weeds, and urban development. We talked about the trajectory of decline in New Zealand's biodiversity. If we were to save some of the species and the natural places and habitats that really distinguish New Zealand, we would have to halt the decline. We asked the public to consider an even higher goal – to turn the tide. This was the central storyline in the strategy. We had a choice as to what the future could be.

We developed a goal to "turn the tide" in New Zealand's biodiversity. A single goal gave us:

- · An ability to talk a "common language" across biodiversity in all environments (land, freshwater, marine) in terms of "halting decline".
- · An incentive to look "across the fences" and see conservation land and private land as making complementary contributions to biodiversity outcomes.

The key to biodiversity conservation is for many different organisations, and many community groups and individuals, to be able to make their contribution – and to know that they are part of a coordinated effort that contributes to a national outcome.

Some of the most important aspects of New Zealand's biodiversity programmes are:

- growing local support and action – communities and businesses and local government getting into action, and learning from one another
- having government agencies being prepared to innovate and test new approaches, learning as they go
- working together, getting the best advisors and also having ordinary people, and all the groups involved within an area, be part of a conversation that builds understanding and commitment.