



Statement from Minister of Conservation, Hon. Eugenie Sage, to National Sanctuaries of NZ Workshop, 14-16 August 2018

Thank you for the invitation to speak at your conference. I was keen to come as I value the work you are doing for conservation and I'm sorry that Ministerial and parliamentary commitments mean I am unable to attend. Your conference organisers asked me to address the question:

What is the direction of the new government with regard to conservation and the role of the community in servicing biodiversity conservation and supporting biodiversity interventions that are not predator management or eradication eg weed control and habitat protection?

I hope my short message will also contribute to today's discussion around the conference theme 'collaboration for conservation'.

This government is committed to conservation. That was evident in Budget 2018 with its significant funding boost to the Department of Conservation to address New Zealand's continuing biodiversity decline.

Budget 2018 provides an extra \$181.6 million in operational funding for conservation over the next four years. This is the largest increase in DOC's budget since 2002 and delivers on the government's promise of significant investment in conservation. The new funds will boost landscape-scale predator control, which is vital for protecting threatened species and habitat, and support biodiversity programmes such as weed control, habitat protection and threatened species recovery.

DOC's goal is that 90% of threatened species across New Zealand's ecosystems are managed to enhance their populations. Even with this extra new funding, DOC cannot turn the tide of biodiversity loss alone. Iwi and hapu, councils, landholders, businesses, environmental organisations, and members of the public all have a crucial role in working to help our indigenous plants and wildlife and their habitats thrive.

One of the significant reform projects is getting work underway on a review of the New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2000, with the aim of completing this by the end of 2019.

While the scope and approach to the review have yet to be agreed by Cabinet, the Strategy is nearly 20 years old, and doesn't convey the sense of urgency we now feel in turning the biodiversity crisis around

We also face new challenges like climate change as well as opportunities from the significant growth in interest in conservation and biodiversity from local government, iwi and the wider public.

It is my intention that the new Biodiversity Strategy will recognise the major contribution our indigenous biodiversity makes to our country's wellbeing. Nature is at the heart of our success as a country and we need to highlight the importance of natural capital and nature's value in providing ecosystem services like nutrient filtration, pollination, flood protection, and help the wider public understand why biodiversity matters.

The revised Strategy will need to clarify the role of increasing number of players in the biodiversity system, and ensure there is effective monitoring and evaluation of shared work.

Ambitious conservation goals like Predator Free New Zealand can only be achieved if people across New Zealand get involved. Sanctuaries NZ - representing a wide network of community organisations - has an extremely important role to play.

I see three areas where members of Sanctuaries NZ can make a big difference.

The first is to inspire New Zealanders and move people's hearts and minds. This is the work your member organisations are doing to connect people to nature, educate people about the importance of our natural heritage, and inspire community action within and beyond the fence. 87% of New Zealanders live in towns and cities. With busy lifestyles and urbanised communities, the opportunity to engage face-to-face with nature, and particularly threatened species, is rare. Your sanctuaries are usually more accessible to many more people than our national parks. Enabling people to connect and engage with nature encourages aroha and appreciation as well enhancing personal and community wellbeing.

Sanctuaries were once places where management organisations aimed to tightly control access, or keep people out of. Island and mainland sanctuaries where it is appropriate for people to visit have become valuable places for learning about New Zealand's special species and the importance of looking after our environment, places that inspire people with what predator control, planting and conservation can achieve.

Secondly, fenced mainland sanctuaries like Wellington's Zealandia inspire communities to act – not just within the sanctuary fence, but in its surrounds. After 20 years of focus on the land within its predator-proof fence, Zealandia's new "Living with Nature" strategy involves working collaboratively with councils, businesses and neighbouring communities to grow the halo of protection "beyond the fence" - to create a nature-rich urban space for Wellingtonians. Species like kaka and tieke (saddleback) are now spilling out over the fence and delighting people in nearby residential areas.

Creating predator-free habitats is a critical foundation of restoration work. Sanctuaries can be a cornerstone for threatened species recovery - as species' safe havens and incubators. So working to encourage people to change their behaviours is another area where Sanctuaries of New Zealand can make a big impact. This is about mobilising, encouraging and supporting people to do the hard work on the ground to protect and restore our biodiversity. This work is as varied as predator control, restoration planting, weeding and controlling plant pests or fundraising – all work aimed at restoring ecological values and helping threatened species recover and return to the places they once flourished.

Thirdly, Sanctuaries NZ can and is making a difference in helping promote collaboration for conservation. The biodiversity crisis is now at such a scale that we have to work in different ways to tackle it, and we have to work better together. There are thousands of large and small community groups and businesses taking conservation action across the country. Although there are now more resources available, there is also more and more competition for these funds, and for people-power. With more organisations contributing, there is also more risk of duplication of effort, or inefficient resource use.

One of the big opportunities is to explore how agencies, community organisations and business can collaborate more effectively, and be more strategic in the ways they work together. An existing network like Sanctuary New Zealand can help lead the way by building a strong strategic alliance with government to find new ways we can enhance outcomes for our threatened species.

I look forward to hearing the results of today's discussions about collaboration for conservation.

Finally, I want to acknowledge again the significant role Sanctuaries of New Zealand Inc. and its members play in protecting native taonga so that all New Zealanders can have the opportunity to get close to, celebrate and look after our wonderful heritage.