

Hon Eugenie Sage

Minister of Conservation
Minita mō Te Papa Atawhai



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**PĀNUI PĀPĀHO
MEDIA STATEMENT**

Mokihinui River catchment land to be added to Kahurangi National Park

Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage today announced the largest addition of land to an existing national park in New Zealand's history.

A total of 64,400 hectares of conservation land in the Mokihinui River catchment on the West Coast north of Westport, including 15 km of riverbed, is being added to Kahurangi National Park.

"Adding this area, roughly half the size of Auckland City, to Kahurangi is the largest addition of land to an existing national park in New Zealand's history," Eugenie Sage said.

"National park status will ensure stronger protection of the Mokihinui area's significant cultural, ecological, historic and recreational values.

"A hydro-electric dam was proposed for the Mokihinui River in 2007. The hydro scheme attracted considerable public interest and strong opposition because of its environmental impacts. It would have flooded the Mokihinui Gorge and inundated beech-podocarp forests and significant habitats of threatened plants and wildlife such as whio/blue duck, kaka, bats and giant land snails.

"A big thanks to the many New Zealanders and the Department of Conservation who spoke up for the river, its gorge, dramatic landscapes, beech-podocarp forests and set out the reasons they deserved protection from a hydro dam.

"Today's announcement is only possible because of that work and advocacy. It is why our Government can now give the Mokihinui Gorge, and the surrounding lands, forests, and mountains the strong protection that comes with being part of a national park.

"The decision in 2012 not to proceed with the hydro scheme was followed by a groundswell of support for giving national park status to the Mokihinui catchment and adding these lands to Kahurangi National Park," Eugenie Sage said.

"Protecting these lands means generations to come will be able to enjoy these beautiful natural landscapes, ride along the Old Ghost Road track alongside the Mokihinui River, and see and hear birds like whio and kaka.

"New Zealanders love our protected national parks which hold international as well as national value. This Government is protecting more of our precious and pristine places.

“I acknowledge and thank Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Waewae for their engagement as manawhenua; and the work of the West Coast *Tai Poutini* Conservation Board and the New Zealand Conservation Authority.

“The Mokihinui lands become part of Kahurangi National Park on 11 April 2019.

“The land being added to the national park stretches inland through the length of the Mokihinui River catchment. It includes about 15 km of the Mokihinui riverbed, all of the Mokihinui Forks Ecological Area, a large part of the Lyell Range-Radiant Range conservation area and a small part of what remains of North West Nelson Forest Park, most of which became Kahurangi National Park when it was established in 1996. The addition connects with the south-west boundary of Kahurangi National Park.

“The Mokihinui addition to Kahurangi National Park is equivalent in size to Abel Tasman and Paparoa National Parks combined and is twice the size of Egmont National Park.

“Kahurangi is our second largest park and with the addition of the Mokihinui land, it will increase in size by 14 per cent to 517,335 hectares. Fiordland National Park, at more than 1,230,000 hectares, is the largest national park.”

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Further information

The Mokihinui River catchment contains a combination of geology, landforms, riverine habitat, vegetation, animal and plant life and related ecological processes not found elsewhere.

The area has characteristic landforms and geological formations, such as the Mokihinui Gorge, and extends from the mountains to almost sea level.

The diversity of forest types within the area supports a wide range of native birds, including whio, kākā, and kea. There is a nationally significant long-tailed bat population, four sub species of *Powelliphanta* snail, six reptile species, freshwater vertebrates and invertebrates and a variety of plant species.

The area is of high significance to Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Waewae. The temperate climate, fertile environment and safe harbours made it an important place to gather and replenish food stores before journeying south along a stretch of difficult coastline.

The land contains the popular Old Ghost Road, the 85km-long mountain biking and walking trail developed by Mokihinui-Lyell Backcountry Trust working with the Department of Conservation and others.

The 2001 Kahurangi National Park Management Plan is to be reviewed to enable consideration of how the Mokihinui addition's significant natural values, its cultural and historic values and recreational uses will be managed into the future along with looking at this for the whole of the park.

The Department of Conservation will work with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Waewae, mana whenua of the Mokihinui land, and other Kahurangi mana whenua iwi partners and also the Nelson Marlborough and West Coast *Tai Poutini* conservation boards on the review of the park management plan that will begin in the coming year.