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Speech Notes

Seachange 05

Heritage Hotel, Auckland, 5.20pm

Good afternoon, and thank you for the invitation to speak about oceans policy to this Seachange 05 conference.

I regret that I am unable to do so in person.

Let me congratulate the Environmental Defence Society for organising the conference. The programme is stimulating and relevant to the debate about how best to manage our ocean resources.

Many sectors are represented here today, and I particularly welcome the overseas visitors. I am sure there is much to be learnt by listening to each other and exchanging ideas.

The development of an oceans policy for New Zealand has recommenced. And as Minister for the Environment, I have taken responsibility in the new government for leading the development of the policy and chairing the Ministerial group that oversees it.

I want the oceans policy to be a flagship of sustainable development in action, and a means of optimising the value of our oceans to New Zealand. By value I mean economically, environmentally, socially and culturally.

The vastness and complexity of the ocean area over which New Zealand has jurisdiction is amazing. Our marine area is 18 times greater than our land area, and that will increase to 24 times once our jurisdiction over an additional area of continental shelf is confirmed.

More than 15,000 marine species have been found in our marine area, and because New Zealand is so isolated, a particularly high proportion of species is found only here.

The health of our oceans, our land and our people are inextricably linked. Many of our activities, including a wide range of recreational and customary uses, depend on our marine biodiversity remaining in a healthy state.

We are a maritime people. The sea dominates New Zealand's climate, life and economy. Our exports and imports are all transported on or over the sea, and the bounty of the sea makes a major contribution to our economy, in fishing, aquaculture, tourism, and minerals such as oil, gas and ironsand.

There has been a huge increase over the last two decades in the income New Zealand generates from the oceans, largely as a result of the establishment of the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone and the development of aquaculture.

Future possibilities for new wealth that could be derived from the oceans are diverse. In biotechnology, the microbiological community under the sea could provide new opportunities for a range of industrial and pharmaceutical processes. There is research underway looking at sustainable marine energy generation from wave and tidal energy. In minerals there could be considerable further opportunities.

Like many nations, we have a plethora of laws, policies and agencies dealing with the wide range of activities affecting the marine environment. But we do not have clear, overarching goals to guide our decisions when different activities and interests come into conflict or compete for the same space. And there are some obvious gaps, such as not being able to require environmental impact assessments for development activities beyond 12 nautical miles.

The government is looking to oceans policy to deal with these deficiencies and provide integrated management of New Zealand's marine resources. We want to ensure that the greatest public benefit results from the use and management of the

oceans. We are trying to think ahead, to develop tools for managing conflicts before they become crises.

Oceans policy is about improving our oceans decision-making. It is also about new opportunities – how to make room for them, and to ensure they and existing activities are sustainable.

The challenges of integrated, cross-sectoral management are substantial. But we know that with better management, the value of the oceans for New Zealand could be optimised, and the growing demand for, and pressures on, marine space, resources and ecosystems more proactively managed.

To develop oceans policy, a cross-government project team of officials has been assembled. The team is led by the Ministry for the Environment, and includes the Department of Conservation, the Ministry of Fisheries, the Ministry of Economic Development, Te Puni Kokiri, the Treasury and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Other departments are also involved as required to offer relevant expertise such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Justice and Maritime New Zealand.

The project team will put together proposals for a strategic, integrated and comprehensive framework to manage and allocate our marine resources, including the interface between land and sea.

Oceans policy was put on hold in 2003 while foreshore and seabed issues were addressed. Since 2003 other significant oceans-related areas have also been addressed, including aquaculture and other reforms to the Resource Management Act, the environmental effects of fishing, and the launch of Ocean Survey 20/20 to survey and map our oceans and seafloor and their resources.

All of these changes will influence oceans policy, as will the government's objective to establish a network of marine protected areas. Some of these initiatives deal with key issues being tackled by oceans policy. For example, the need for better information had already been signalled as a desired outcome.

The information from Ocean Survey 20/20 will underpin oceans policy and oceans management tools.

We expect to consult publicly on oceans policy proposals next year. It is too early to raise any options in this forum, but we would want to talk to you and other stakeholder groups and individuals with an interest in oceans management. I intend for the development of an oceans policy to continue to be an inclusive process.

The Ministry for the Environment is updating its contact lists for oceans policy, so if you want to be involved, I encourage you to contact MfE directly.

The work now being undertaken builds on and takes further the work done between 2000 and 2003. This includes designing a policy that gives effect to the vision put forward after the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Oceans Policy – chaired by Dame Catherine Tizard – talked to thousands of New Zealanders.

**Put simply, that vision is –
Healthy oceans, wisely managed for the greatest benefit to New Zealand, now and in the future.**

The theme of this conference is managing our coastal waters and oceans. Through examining international experience and local practice, you are aiming to identify what we are doing well and where we are falling short. We have a lot to learn from other countries' experience. And we need to find a way to take those lessons and adapt them to our unique circumstances.

Once a country has a framework for an oceans policy – be it legislative or not – there are real implementation challenges. I ask you to think about the challenges for New Zealand. Challenges such as how far do we need to change the current system to achieve an effective oceans policy? Can we make our existing mechanisms work better? Or do we need to do more?

Enjoy the rest of the conference. I look forward to receiving feedback on the lessons learnt and conclusions reached.