

Taylor & Grainger: High expectations for environmental reform

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It's an incredibly exciting time to be an environmental advocate. The election of the Labour government and the recent Cabinet appointments promise a period of fundamental reform of the way we manage our built and natural environments. The next 3 years should see changes that address many of the pressing issues that concern so many New Zealanders. We are really looking forward to engaging with Ministers across the range of legal and institutional reforms in prospect.

The first of these is the reform of the resource management system which is set for the most far-reaching changes in 30 years. The government has committed to replace the Resource Management Act with 2 new pieces of legislation in accordance with the recommendations from the expert Randerson panel.

Those changes should reduce red tape, lower compliance costs, speed up and simplify plan-making and better protect the environment. The new system should better enable housing while setting clear biophysical limits to turn around our still-declining environmental indicators. It will also include national direction on addressing climate change while a third new act will provide direction on managed retreat from coastal inundation.

These changes to the present system are deep and wide and delivering in 3 years is an heroic timeframe. That is especially so when you consider that the present resource management system will keep trucking on meantime: a National Policy Statement on Indigenous Biodiversity is imminent and the freshwater reforms are now in implementation mode. Transitioning seamlessly from the old to the new will be a big challenge. David Parker is clearly the best person to provide Ministerial oversight of all of this.

Secondly, we now have a new Minister for Oceans and Fisheries – also David Parker. This was unexpected but reflects a long-standing interest by the Prime Minister in having a fresh look at the way we manage those resources. Our oceans are enormous and are both a source of food as well as habitat for many threatened seabirds and marine mammals. It's definitely time to have a look at the outdated laws – very much first generation ones - and fishing methods we employ to see if we can do better. We favour a full-blown Inquiry into fisheries management which was actually promised by Labour at the previous election but thwarted by New Zealand First. And it's time to push ahead with new marine reserve legislation and deploy marine spatial planning.

Thirdly, much of the legal framework for the conservation estate, which covers one-third of Aotearoa, is hopelessly out of date. It provides inadequate guidance as to the role of iwi and reflects an earlier generation of thinking about biodiversity and how to protect it. We favour

a wide-ranging look at the panoply of conservation law as the first step in working out a better way forward. Kiri Allan has been given this portfolio and we expect her to step up quickly to embrace the reform agenda on land and sea.

Finally, it was pleasing to see James Shaw reappointed as Climate Change Minister. He was able to work across party lines during the last term of government and will need to do so again but this time the challenge will be getting the relevant Labour Ministers on side. Achieving our 2030 target and getting to net zero emissions by 2050 will require all government ministers to actively support the program. We can really crack on (as the Prime Minister said) and get to 100% renewables, electrify the entire transport fleet, and push harder for robust pricing signals via the ETS. There's unfinished business with respect to agricultural emissions and a need to take a clear look at whether science really can deliver on methane emissions or whether that's a pipedream.

We look forward to hearing from Minister Shaw and Minister Parker at EDS's Climate Change and Business Conference on 11-12 November.

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